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The Other House

By
Henry James

In Two Volumes

Vol. i

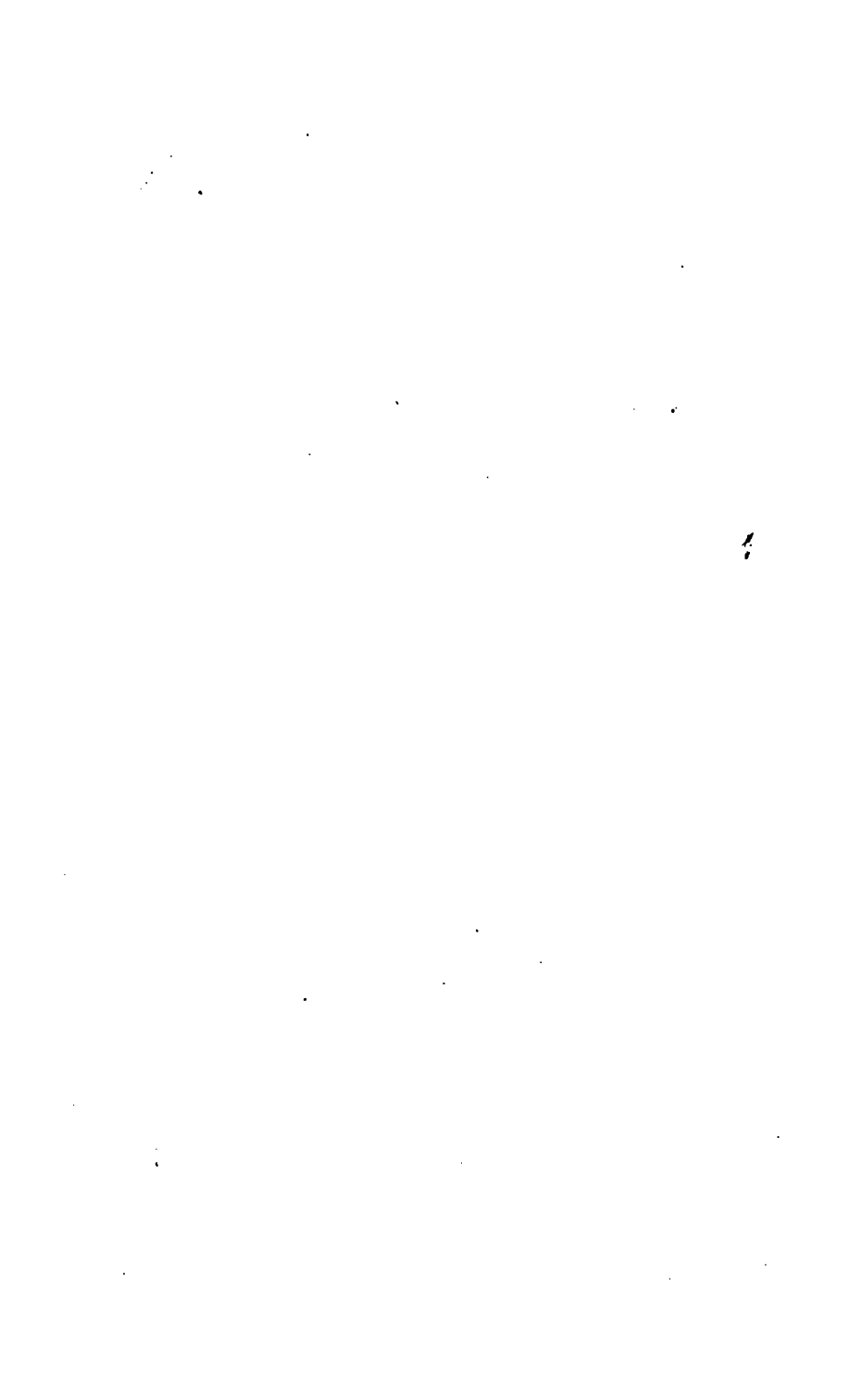
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BOOK FIRST

VOL. I

A



I

MRS. BEEVER of Eastmead, and of "Beever and Bream," was a close, though not a cruel observer of what went on, as she always said, at the other house. A great deal more went on there, naturally, than in the great clean, square solitude in which she had practically lived since the death of Mr. Beever, who had predeceased by three years his friend and partner, the late Paul Bream of Bounds, leaving to his only son, the little godson of that trusted associate, the substantial share of the business in which his wonderful widow—she knew and rejoiced that she was wonderful—now had a distinct voice. Paul Beever, in the bloom of eighteen, had just achieved a scramble from Winchester to Oxford: it was his mother's design that he should go into as many things as possible before coming into the Bank. The Bank, the pride of Wilverley, the high clear arch of which the two

houses were the solid piers, was worth an expensive education. It was, in the 'talk of town and county, "hundreds of years" old, and as incalculably "good" as a subject of so much infallible arithmetic could very well be. That it enjoyed the services of Mrs. Beever herself was at present enough for her and an ample contentment to Paul, who inclined so little to the sedentary that she foresaw she should some day be as anxious at putting him into figures as she had in his childhood been easy about putting him into breeches. Half the ground moreover was held by young Anthony Bream, the actual master of Bounds, the son and successor of her husband's colleague.

She was a woman indeed of many purposes; another of which was that on leaving Oxford the boy should travel and inform himself: she belonged to the age that regarded a foreign tour not as a hasty dip, but as a deliberate plunge. Still another had for its main feature that on his final return he should marry the nicest girl she knew: that too would be a deliberate plunge, a plunge that would besprinkle his mother. It would do with the question what it was Mrs. Beever's inveterate household practice

to do with all loose and unarranged objects—it would get it out of the way. There would have been difficulty in saying whether it was a feeling for peace or for war, but her constant habit was to lay the ground bare for complications that as yet at least had never taken place. Her life was like a room prepared for a dance: the furniture was all against the walls. About the young lady in question she was perfectly definite; the nicest girl she knew was Jean Martle, whom she had just sent for at Brighton to come and perform in that character. The performance was to be for the benefit of Paul, whose midsummer return was at hand and in whom the imagination of alternatives was to be discouraged from the first. It was on the whole a comfort to Mrs. Beever that he had little imagination of anything.

Jean Martle, condemned to Brighton by a father who was Mrs. Beever's second cousin and whom the doctors, the great men in London, kept there, as this lady opined, because he was too precious wholly to lose and too boring often to see—Jean Martle would probably some day have money and would possibly some day have sense: even as

regards a favoured candidate this marked the extent of Mrs. Beever's somewhat dry expectations. They were addressed in a subordinate degree to the girl's "playing," which was depended on to become brilliant, and to her hair, which was viewed in the light of a hope that it would with the lapse of years grow darker. Wilverley, in truth, would never know if she played ill ; but it had an old-fashioned prejudice against loud shades in the natural covering of the head. One of the things his cousin had been invited for was that Paul should get used to her eccentric colour—a colour of which, on a certain bright Sunday of July, Mrs. Beever noted afresh, with some alarm, the exaggerated pitch. Her young friend had arrived two days before and now—during the elastic interval from church to luncheon—had been despatched to Bounds with a message and some preliminary warnings. Jean knew that she should find there a house in some confusion, a new-born little girl, the first, a young mother not yet "up," and an odd visitor, somewhat older than herself, in the person of Miss Armiger, a school-friend of Mrs. Bream, who had made her appearance a month before that of the child and had stayed on,

as Mrs. Beever with some emphasis put it, "right through everything."

This picture of the situation had filled, after the first hour or two, much of the time of the two ladies, but it had originally included for Jean no particular portrait of the head of the family—an omission in some degree repaired, however, by the chance of Mrs. Beever's having on the Saturday morning taken her for a moment into the Bank. They had had errands in the town, and Mrs. Beever had wished to speak to Mr. Bream, a brilliant, joking gentleman, who, instantly succumbing to their invasion and turning out a confidential clerk, had received them in his beautiful private room. "Shall I like him?" Jean, with the sense of a widening circle, had, before this, adventurously asked. "Oh, yes, if you notice him!" Mrs. Beever had replied in obedience to an odd private prompting to mark him as insignificant. Later on, at the Bank, the girl noticed him enough to feel rather afraid of him: that was always with her the foremost result of being noticed herself. If Mrs. Beever passed him over, this was in part to be accounted for by all that at Eastmead was usually taken for granted. The

queen-mother, as Anthony Bream kept up the jest of calling her, would not have found it easy to paint off-hand a picture of the allied sovereign whom she was apt to regard as a somewhat restless vassal. Though he was a dozen years older than the happy young prince on whose behalf she exercised her regency, she had known him from his boyhood, and his strong points and his weak were alike an old story to her.

His house was new—he had on his marriage, at a vast expense, made it quite violently so. His wife and his child were new; new also in a marked degree was the young woman who had lately taken up her abode with him and who had the air of intending to remain till she should lose that quality. But Tony himself—this had always been his name to her—was intensely familiar. Never doubting that he was a subject she had mastered, Mrs. Beever had no impulse to clear up her view by distributing her impressions. These impressions were as neatly pigeon-holed as her correspondence and her accounts—neatly, at least, save in so far as they were besprinkled with the dust of time. One of them might have been freely rendered into a hint

that her young partner was a possible source of danger to her own sex. Not to her personally, of course; for herself, somehow, Mrs. Beever was not of her own sex. If she *had* been a woman—she never thought of herself so loosely—she would, in spite of her age, have doubtless been conscious of peril. She now recognised none in life except that of Paul's marrying wrong, against which she had taken early measures. It would have been a misfortune therefore to feel a flaw in a security otherwise so fine. Was not perhaps the fact that she had a vague sense of exposure for Jean Martle a further motive for her not expatiating to that young lady on Anthony Bream? If any such sense operated, I hasten to add, it operated without Jean's having mentioned that at the Bank he had struck her as formidable.

Let me not fail equally to declare that Mrs. Beever's general suspicion of him, as our sad want of signs for shades and degrees condemns me to call it, rested on nothing in the nature of evidence. If she had ever really uttered it she might have been brought up rather short on the question of grounds. There were certainly, at any rate, no grounds in

Tony's having, before church, sent a word over to her on the subject of their coming to luncheon. "Dear Julia, this morning, is really grand," he had written. "We've just managed to move to her downstairs room, where they've put up a lovely bed and where the sight of all her things cheers and amuses her, to say nothing of the wide immediate outlook at her garden and her own corner of the terrace. In short the waves are going down and we're beginning to have our meals 'regular.' Luncheon may be rather late, but do bring over your charming little friend. How she lighted up yesterday my musty den! There will be another little friend, by the way—not of mine, but of Rose Armiger's, the young man to whom, as I think you know, she's engaged to be married. He's just back from China and comes down till to-morrow. Our Sunday trains are such a bore that, having wired him to take the other line, I'm sending to meet him at Plumbury." Mrs. Beever had no need to reflect on these few lines to be comfortably conscious that they summarised the nature of her neighbour—down to the "dashed sociability," as she had heard the poor fellow, in sharp reactions, himself call it,

that had made him scribble them and that always made him talk too much for a man in what, more than he, she held to be a "position." He was there in his premature bustle over his wife's slow recovery; he was there in his boyish impatience to improvise a feast; he was there in the simplicity with which he exposed himself to the depredations, to the possible avalanche, of Miss Armiger's belongings. He was there moreover in his free-handed way of sending six miles for a young man from China, and he was most of all there in his allusion to the probable lateness of luncheon. Many things in these days were new at the other house, but nothing was so new as the hours of meals. Mrs. Beever had of old repeatedly dined there on the stroke of six. It will be seen that, as I began with declaring, she kept her finger on the pulse of Bounds.

II

WHEN Jean Martle, arriving with her message, was ushered into the hall, it struck her at first as empty, and during the moment that she supposed herself in sole possession she perceived it to be showy and indeed rather splendid. Bright, large and high, richly decorated and freely used, full of "corners" and communications, it evidently played equally the part of a place of reunion and of a place of transit. It contained so many large pictures that if they hadn't looked somehow so recent it might have passed for a museum. The shaded summer was in it now, and the odour of many flowers, as well as the tick from the chimney-piece of a huge French clock which Jean recognised as modern. The colour of the air, the frank floridity, amused and charmed her. It was not till the servant had left her that she became aware she was not alone—a discovery that soon gave her an embarrassed

minute. At the other end of the place appeared a young woman in a posture that, with interposing objects, had made her escape notice, a young woman bent low over a table at which she seemed to have been writing. Her chair was pushed back, her face buried in her extended and supported arms, her whole person relaxed and abandoned. She had heard neither the swing of the muffled door nor any footfall on the deep carpet, and her attitude denoted a state of mind that made the messenger from Eastmead hesitate between quickly retreating on tiptoe or still more quickly letting her know that she was observed. Before Jean could decide her companion looked up, then rapidly and confusedly rose. She could only be Miss Armiger, and she had been such a figure of woe that it was a surprise not to see her in tears. She was by no means in tears; but she was for an instant extremely blank, an instant during which Jean remembered, rather to wonder at it, Mrs. Beever's having said of her that one really didn't know whether she was awfully plain or strikingly handsome. Jean felt that one quite did know: she was awfully plain. It may immediately be mentioned that about the charm of

the apparition offered meanwhile to her own eyes Rose Armiger had not a particle of doubt: a slim, fair girl who struck her as a light sketch for something larger, a cluster of happy hints with nothing yet quite "put in" but the splendour of the hair and the grace of the clothes—clothes that were not as the clothes of Wilverley. The reflection of these things came back to Jean from a pair of eyes as to which she judged that the extreme lightness of their grey was what made them so strange as to be ugly—a reflection that spread into a sudden smile from a wide, full-lipped mouth, whose regular office, obviously, was to produce the second impression. In a flash of small square white teeth this second impression was produced and the ambiguity that Mrs. Beever had spoken of lighted up—an ambiguity worth all the dull prettiness in the world. Yes, one quite did know: Miss Armiger was strikingly handsome. It thus took her but a few seconds to repudiate every connection with the sombre image Jean had just encountered.

"Excuse my jumping out at you," she said. "I heard a sound—I was expecting a friend." Jean thought her attitude an odd one for the purpose, but

hinted a fear of being in that case in the way ; on which the young lady protested that she was delighted to see her, that she had already heard of her, that she guessed who she was. " And I dare say you've already heard of *me*."

Jean shyly confessed to this, and getting away from the subject as quickly as possible, produced on the spot her formal credentials.

" Mrs. Beever sent me over to ask if it's really quite right we should come to luncheon. We came out of church before the sermon, because of some people who were to go home with us. They're with Mrs. Beever now, but she told me to come straight across the garden—the short way."

Miss Armiger continued to smile. " No way ever seems short enough for Mrs. Beever ! "

There was an intention in this, as Jean faintly felt, that was lost upon her ; but while she was wondering her companion went on :

" Did Mrs. Beever direct you to inquire of *me* ? "

Jean hesitated. " Of any one, I think, who would be here to tell me in case Mrs. Bream shouldn't be quite so well."

"She isn't quite so well."

The younger girl's face showed the flicker of a fear of losing her entertainment; on perceiving which the elder pursued:

"But we shan't romp or racket—shall we? We shall be very quiet."

"Very, very quiet," Jean eagerly echoed.

Her new friend's smile became a laugh, which was followed by the abrupt question: "Do you mean to be long with Mrs. Beever?"

"Till her son comes home. You know he's at Oxford, and his term soon ends."

"And yours ends with it—you depart as he arrives?"

"Mrs. Beever tells me I positively shan't," said Jean.

"Then you positively won't. Everything is done here exactly as Mrs. Beever tells us. Don't you like her son?" Rose Armiger asked.

"I don't know yet; it's exactly what she wants me to find out."

"Then you'll have to be very clear."

"But if I find out I don't?" Jean risked.

"I shall be very sorry for you!"

"I think then it will be the only thing in this love of an old place that I shan't have liked."

Rose Armiger for a moment rested her eyes on her visitor, who was more and more conscious that she was strange and yet not, as Jean had always supposed strange people to be, disagreeable. "Do you like *me*?" she unexpectedly inquired.

"How can I tell—at the end of three minutes?"

"*I* can tell—at the end of one! You must try to like me—you must be very kind to me," Miss Armiger declared. Then she added: "Do you like Mr. Bream?"

Jean considered; she felt that she must rise to the occasion. "Oh, immensely!" At this her interlocutress laughed again, and it made her continue with more reserve: "Of course I only saw him for five minutes—yesterday at the Bank."

"Oh, we know how long you saw him!" Miss Armiger exclaimed. "He has told us all about your visit."

Jean was slightly awe-stricken: this picture seemed to include so many people. "Whom has he told?"

Her companion had the air of being amused at everything she said; but for Jean it was an air,

none the less, with a kind of foreign charm in it. "Why, the very first person was of course his poor little wife."

"But I'm not to see *her*, am I?" Jean rather eagerly asked, puzzled by the manner of the allusion and but half suspecting it to be a part of her informant's general ease.

"You're not to see her, but even if you were she wouldn't hurt you for it," this young lady replied. "She understands his friendly way and likes above all his beautiful frankness."

Jean's bewilderment began to look as if she too now, as she remembered, understood and liked these things. It might have been in confirmation of what was in her mind that she presently said: "He told me I might see the wonderful baby. He told me he would show it to me himself."

"I'm sure he'll be delighted to do that. He's awfully proud of the wonderful baby."

"I suppose it's very lovely," Jean remarked with growing confidence.

"Lovely! Do you think babies are ever lovely?"

Taken aback by this challenge, Jean reflected a little; she found, however, nothing better to say

than, rather timidly: "I like dear little children, don't you?"

Miss Armiger in turn considered. "Not a bit!" she then replied. "It would be very sweet and attractive of me to say I adore them; but I never pretend to feelings I can't keep up, don't you know? If you'd like, all the same, to see Effie," she obligingly added, "I'll so far sacrifice myself as to get her for you."

Jean smiled as if this pleasantry were contagious. "You won't sacrifice *her*?"

Rose Armiger stared. "I won't destroy her."

"Then do get her."

"Not yet, not yet!" cried another voice—that of Mrs. Beever, who had just been introduced and who, having heard the last words of the two girls, came, accompanied by the servant, down the hall. "The baby's of no importance. We've come over for the mother. Is it true that Julia has had a bad turn?" she asked of Rose Armiger.

Miss Armiger had a peculiar way of looking at a person before speaking, and she now, with this detachment, delayed so long to answer Mrs. Beever that Jean also rested her eyes, as if for a reason, on

the good lady from Eastmead. She greatly admired her, but in that instant, the first of seeing her at Bounds, she perceived once for all how the difference of the setting made another thing of the gem. Short and solid, with rounded corners and full supports, her hair very black and very flat, her eyes very small for the amount of expression they could show, Mrs. Beever was so "early Victorian" as to be almost prehistoric—was constructed to move amid massive mahogany and sit upon banks of Berlin-wool. She was like an odd volume, "sensibly" bound, of some old magazine. Jean knew that the great social event of her younger years had been her going to a fancy-ball in the character of an Andalusian, an incident of which she still carried a memento in the shape of a hideous fan. Jean was so constituted that she also knew, more dimly but at the end of five minutes, that the elegance at Mr. Bream's was slightly provincial. It made none the less a medium in which Mrs. Beever looked superlatively local. That indeed in turn caused Jean to think the old place still more of a "love."

"I believe our poor friend feels rather down," Miss

Armiger finally brought out. "But I don't imagine it's of the least consequence," she immediately added.

The contrary of this was, however, in some degree foreshadowed in a speech directed to Jean by the footman who had admitted her. He reported Mr. Bream as having been in his wife's room for nearly an hour, and Dr. Ramage as having arrived some time before and not yet come out. Mrs. Beever decreed, upon this news, that they must drop their idea of lunching and that Jean must go straight back to the friends who had been left at the other house. It was these friends who, on the way from church, had mentioned their having got wind of the rumour—the quick circulation of which testified to the compactness of Wilverley—that there had been a sudden change in Mrs. Bream since the hour at which her husband's note was written. Mrs. Beever dismissed her companion to Eastmead with a message for her visitors. Jean was to entertain them there in her stead and to understand that she might return to luncheon only in case of being sent for. At the door the girl paused and exclaimed rather wistfully to Rose Armiger: "Well, then, give her my love!"

III

"YOUR young friend," Rose commented, "is as affectionate as she's pretty: sending her love to people she has never seen!"

"She only meant the little girl. I think it's rather nice of her," said Mrs. Beever. "My interest in these anxieties is always confined to the mamma. I thought we were going so straight."

"I dare say we are," Miss Armiger replied. "But Nurse told me an hour ago that I'm not to see her at all this morning. It will be the first morning for several days."

Mrs. Beever was silent a little. "You've enjoyed a privilege altogether denied to *me*."

"Ah, you must remember," said Rose, "that I'm Julia's oldest friend. That's always the way she treats me."

Mrs. Beever assented. "Familiarly, of course. Well, you're not mine; but that's the way I treat

you too," she went on. "You must wait with me here for more news, and be as still as a mouse."

"Dear Mrs. Beever," the girl protested, "I never made a noise in all my life!"

"You will some day—you're so clever," Mrs. Beever said.

"I'm clever enough to be quiet." Then Rose added, less gaily: "I'm the one thing of her own that dear Julia has ever had."

Mrs. Beever raised her eyebrows. "Don't you count her husband?"

"I count Tony immensely; but in another way."

Again Mrs. Beever considered: she might have been wondering in what way even so expert a young person as this could count Anthony Bream except as a treasure to his wife. But what she presently articulated was: "Do you call him 'Tony' to himself?"

Miss Armiger met her question this time promptly. "He has asked me to—and to do it even to Julia. Don't be afraid!" she exclaimed; "I know my place and I shan't go too far. Of course he's everything to her now," she continued, "and the child is already almost as much; but what I mean is that if he counts

for a great deal more, I, at least, go back a good deal further. Though I'm three years older we were brought together as girls by one of the strongest of all ties—the tie of a common aversion."

"Oh, I know your common aversion!" Mrs. Beever spoke with her air of general competence.

"Perhaps then you know that her detestable stepmother was, very little to my credit, my aunt. If her father, that is, was Mrs. Grantham's second husband, my uncle, my mother's brother, had been the first. Julia lost her mother; I lost both my mother and my father. Then Mrs. Grantham took me: she had shortly before made her second marriage. She put me at the horrid school at Weymouth at which she had already put her step-daughter."

"You ought to be obliged to her," Mrs. Beever suggested, "for having made you acquainted."

"We are—we've never ceased to be. It was as if she had made us sisters, with the delightful position for me of the elder, the protecting one. But it's the only good turn she has ever done us."

Mrs. Beever weighed this statement with her alternative, her business manner. "Is she really then such a monster?"

Rose Armiger had a melancholy headshake. "Don't ask me about her—I dislike her too much, perhaps, to be strictly fair. For me, however, I daresay, it didn't matter so much that she was narrow and hard: I wasn't an easy victim—I could take care of myself, I could fight. But Julia bowed her head and suffered. Never was a marriage more of a rescue."

Mrs. Beever took this in with unsuspended criticism. "And yet Mrs. Grantham travelled all the way down from town the other day simply to make her a visit of a couple of hours."

"That wasn't a kindness," the girl returned; "it was an injury, and I believe—certainly Julia believes—that it was a calculated one. Mrs. Grantham knew perfectly the effect she would have, and she triumphantly had it. She came, she said, at the particular crisis, to 'make peace.' Why couldn't she let the poor dear alone? She only stirred up the wretched past and reopened old wounds."

For answer to this Mrs. Beever remarked with some irrelevancy: "She abused *you* a good deal, I think."

Her companion smiled frankly. "Shockingly, I believe ; but that's of no importance to me. She doesn't touch me or reach me now."

"Your description of her," said Mrs. Beever, "is a description of a monstrous bad woman. And yet she appears to have got two honourable men to give her the last proof of confidence."

"My poor uncle utterly withdrew his confidence when he saw her as she was. She killed him—he died of his horror of her. As for Julia's father, he's honourable if you like, but he's a muff. He's afraid of his wife."

"And her 'taking' you, as you say, who were no real relation to her—her looking after you and putting you at school: wasn't that," Mrs. Beever pro-pounded, "a kindness?"

"She took me to torment me—or at least to make me feel her hand. She has an absolute necessity to do that—it was what brought her down here the other day."

"You make out a wonderful case," said Mrs. Beever, "and if ever I'm put on my trial for a crime—say for muddling the affairs of the Bank—I hope I shall be defended by some one with your gift and

your manner. I don't wonder," she blandly pursued, "that your friends, even the blameless ones, like this dear pair, cling to you as they do."

"If you mean you don't wonder I stay on here so long," said Rose good-humouredly, "I'm greatly obliged to you for your sympathy. Julia's the one thing I have of my own."

"You make light of our husbands and lovers!" laughed Mrs. Beever. "Haven't I had the pleasure of hearing of a gentleman to whom you're soon to be married?"

Rose Armiger opened her eyes—there was perhaps a slight affectation in it. She looked, at any rate, as if she had to make a certain effort to meet the allusion. "Dennis Vidal?" she then asked.

"Lord, are there more than one?" Mrs. Beever cried; after which, as the girl, who had coloured a little, hesitated in a way that almost suggested alternatives, she added: "Isn't it a definite engagement?"

Rose Armiger looked round at the clock. "Mr. Vidal will be here this morning. Ask him how he considers it."

One of the doors of the hall at this moment

opened, and Mrs. Beever exclaimed with some eagerness: "Here he is, perhaps!" Her eagerness was characteristic; it was part of a comprehensive vision in which the pieces had already fallen into sharp adjustment to each other. The young lady she had been talking with had in these few minutes, for some reason, struck her more forcibly than ever before as a possible object of interest to a youth of a candour greater even than any it was incumbent on a respectable mother to cultivate. Miss Armiger had just given her a glimpse of the way she could handle honest gentlemen as "muffs." She was decidedly too unusual to be left out of account. If there was the least danger of Paul's falling in love with her it ought somehow to be arranged that her marriage should encounter no difficulty.

The person now appearing, however, proved to be only Doctor Ramage, who, having a substantial wife of his own, was peculiarly unfitted to promise relief to Mrs. Beever's anxiety. He was a little man who moved, with a warning air, on tiptoe, as if he were playing some drawing-room game of surprises, and who had a face so candid and circular that it suggested a large white pill. Mrs. Beever had once

said with regard to sending for him: "It isn't to take his medicine, it's to take *him*. I take him twice a week in a cup of tea." It was his tone that did her good. He had in his hand a sheet of note-paper, one side of which was covered with writing and with which he immediately addressed himself to Miss Armiger. It was a prescription to be made up, and he begged her to see that it was carried on the spot to the chemist's, mentioning that on leaving Mrs. Bream's room he had gone straight to the library to think it out. Rose, who appeared to recognise at a glance its nature, replied that as she was fidgety and wanted a walk she would perform the errand herself. Her bonnet and jacket were there; she had put them on to go to church, and then, on second thoughts, seeing Mr. Bream give it up, had taken them off.

"Excellent for you to go yourself," said the Doctor. He had an instruction to add, to which, lucid and prompt, already equipped, she gave full attention. As she took the paper from him he subjoined: "You're a very nice, sharp, obliging person."

"She knows what she's about!" said Mrs. Beever

with much expression. "But what in the world is Julia about?"

"I'll tell you when *I* know, my dear lady."

"Is there really anything wrong?"

"I'm waiting to find out."

Miss Armiger, before leaving them, was waiting too. She had been checked on the way to the door by Mrs. Beever's question, and she stood there with her intensely clear eyes on Doctor Ramage's face.

Mrs. Beever continued to study it as earnestly.

"Then you're not going yet?"

"By no means, though I've another pressing call. I must have that thing from you first," he said to Rose.

She went to the door, but there again she paused.

"Is Mr. Bream still with her?"

"Very much with her—that's why I'm here. She made a particular request to be left for five minutes alone with him."

"So Nurse isn't there either?" Rose asked.

"Nurse has embraced the occasion to pop down for her lunch. Mrs. Bream has taken it into her head that she has something very important to say."

Mrs. Beever firmly seated herself. "And pray what may that be?"

"She turned me out of the room precisely so that I shouldn't learn."

"I think *I* know what it is," their companion, at the door, put in.

"Then what is it?" Mrs. Beever demanded.

"Oh, I wouldn't tell you for the world!" And with this Rose Armiger departed.

IV

LEFT alone with the lady of Eastmead, Doctor Ramage studied his watch a little absently. "Our young friend's exceedingly nervous."

Mrs. Beever glanced in the direction in which Rose had disappeared. "Do you allude to that girl?"

"I allude to dear Mrs. Tony."

"It's equally true of Miss Armiger; she's as worried as a pea on a pan. Julia, as far as that goes," Mrs. Beever continued, "can never have been a person to hold herself together."

"Precisely—she requires to be held. Well, happily she has Tony to hold her."

"Then he's not himself in one of his states?"

Doctor Ramage hesitated. "I don't quite make him out. He seems to have fifty things at once in his head."

Mrs. Beever looked at the Doctor hard. "When

does he ever not have ? But I had a note from him only this morning—in the highest spirits."

Doctor Ramage's little eyes told nothing but what he wanted. "Well, whatever happens to him, he'll always have *them*!"

Mrs. Beever at this jumped up. "Robert Ramage," she earnestly demanded, "what *is* to happen to that boy?"

Before he had time to reply there rang out a sudden sound which had, oddly, much of the effect of an answer and which caused them both to start. It was the near vibration, from Mrs. Bream's room, of one of the smart, loud electric bells which were for Mrs. Beever the very accent of the newness of Bounds. They waited an instant ; then the Doctor said quietly : "It's for Nurse!"

"It's not for you?" The bell sounded again as she spoke.

"It's for Nurse," Doctor Ramage repeated, moving nevertheless to the door he had come in by. He paused again to listen, and the door, the next moment thrown open, gave passage to a tall, good-looking young man, dressed as if, with much freshness, for church, and wearing a large orchid

in his buttonhole. "You rang for Nurse?" the Doctor immediately said.

The young man stood looking from one of his friends to the other. "She's there—it's all right. But ah, my dear people——!" And he passed his hand, with the vivid gesture of brushing away an image, over a face of which the essential radiance was visible even through perturbation.

"How's Julia now?" Mrs. Beever asked.

"Much relieved, she tells me, at having spoken."

"Spoken of what, Tony?"

"Of everything she can think of that's inconceivable—that's damnable."

"If I hadn't known that she wanted to do exactly that," said the Doctor, "I wouldn't have given her the opportunity."

Mrs. Beever's eyes sounded her colleague of the Bank. "You're upset, my poor boy—you're in one of your greatest states. Something painful to you has taken place."

Tony Bream paid no attention to this remark; all his attention was for his other visitor, who stood with one hand on the door of the hall and an open watch, on which he still placidly gazed, in

the other. "Ramage," the young man suddenly broke out, "are you keeping something back? *Isn't* she safe?"

The good Doctor's small, neat face seemed to grow more genially globular. "The dear lady is convinced, you mean, that her very last hour is at hand?"

"So much so," Tony replied, "that if she got you and Nurse away, if she made me kneel down by her bed and take her two hands in mine, what do you suppose it was to say to me?"

Doctor Ramage beamed. "Why, of course, that she's going to perish in her flower. I've been through it so often!" he said to Mrs. Beever.

"Before, but not after," that lady lucidly rejoined. "She has had her chance of perishing, but now it's too late."

"Doctor," said Tony Bream, "is my wife going to die?"

His friend hesitated a moment. "When a lady's only symptom of that tendency is the charming volubility with which she dilates upon it, that's very well as far as it goes. But it's not quite enough."

"She says she *knows* it," Tony returned. "But you surely know more than she, don't you?"

"I know everything that can be known. I know that when, in certain conditions, pretty young mothers have acquitted themselves of that inevitable declaration, they turn over and go comfortably to sleep."

"That's exactly," said Tony, "what Nurse must make her do."

"It's exactly what she's doing." Doctor Ramage had no sooner spoken than Mrs. Bream's bell sounded for the third time. "Excuse me!" he imperturbably added. "Nurse calls me."

"And doesn't she call me?" cried Tony.

"Not in the least." The Doctor raised his hand with instant authority. "Stay where you are!" With this he went off to his patient.

If Mrs. Beever often produced, with promptitude, her theory that the young banker was subject to "states," this habit, of which he was admirably tolerant, was erected on the sense of something in him of which even a passing observer might have caught a glimpse. A woman of still more wit than Mrs. Beever, whom he had met on the threshold of

life, once explained some accident to him by the words : "The reason is, you know, that you're so exaggerated." This had not been a manner of saying that he was inclined to overshoot the truth ; it had been an attempt to express a certain quality of passive excess which was the note of the whole man and which, for an attentive eye, began with his neckties and ended with his intonations. To look at him was immediately to see that he was a collection of gifts, which presented themselves as such precisely by having in each case slightly overflowed the measure. He could do things—this was all he knew about them ; and he was ready-made, as it were—he had not had to put himself together. His dress was just too fine, his colour just too high, his moustache just too long, his voice just too loud, his smile just too gay. His movement, his manner, his tone were respectively just too free, too easy and too familiar ; his being a very handsome, happy, clever, active, ambitiously local young man was in short just too obvious. But the result of it all was a presence that was in itself a close contact, the air of immediate, unconscious, unstinted life, and of his doing what he liked and liking to please. One of

his "states," for Mrs. Beever, was the state of his being a boy again, and the sign of it was his talking nonsense. It was not an example of that tendency, but she noted almost as if it were that almost as soon as the Doctor had left them he asked if she had not brought over to him that awfully pretty girl.

"She has been here, but I sent her home again." Then his visitor added: "Does she strike you as awfully pretty?"

"As pretty as a pretty song! I took a tremendous notion to her."

"She's only a child—for mercy's sake don't show your notion too much!" Mrs. Beever ejaculated.

Tony Bream gave his bright stare; after which, with his still brighter alacrity, "I see what you mean: of course I won't!" he declared. Then, as if candidly and conscientiously wondering: "Is it showing it too much to hope she'll come back to luncheon?"

"Decidedly—if Julia's so down."

"That's only too much for Julia—not for *her*," Tony said with his flurried smile. "But Julia knows about her, hopes she's coming and wants

everything to be natural and pleasant." He passed his hand over his eyes again, and as if at the same time recognising that his tone required explanation, "It's just because Julia's so down, don't you see?" he subjoined. "A fellow can't stand it."

Mrs. Beever spoke after a pause during which her companion roamed rather jerkily about. "It's a mere accidental fluctuation. You may trust Ramage to know."

"Yes, thank God, I may trust Ramage to know!" He had the accent of a man constitutionally accessible to suggestion, and could turn the next instant to a quarter more cheering. "Do you happen to have an idea of what has become of Rose?"

Again Mrs. Beever, making a fresh observation, waited a little before answering. "Do you now call her 'Rose'?"

"Dear, yes—talking with Julia. And with *her*," he went on as if he couldn't quite remember—"do I too? Yes," he recollected, "I think I must."

"What one must one must," said Mrs. Beever

dryly. "'Rose,' then, has gone over to the chemist's for the Doctor."

"How jolly of her!" Tony exclaimed. "She's a tremendous comfort."

Mrs. Beever committed herself to no opinion on this point, but it was doubtless on account of the continuity of the question that she presently asked: "Who's this person who's coming to-day to marry her?"

"A very good fellow, I believe—and 'rising': a clerk in some Eastern house."

"And why hasn't he come sooner?"

"Because he has been at Hong Kong, or some such place, trying hard to pick up an income. 'He's 'poor but pushing,' she says. They've no means but her own two hundred."

"Two hundred a year? That's quite enough for them!" Mrs. Beever opined.

"Then you had better tell him so!" laughed Tony.

"I hope you'll back me up!" she returned; after which, before he had time to speak, she broke out with irrelevance: "How is it she knows what Julia wanted to say to you?"

Tony, surprised, looked vague. "Just now? Does she know?—I haven't the least idea." Rose appeared at this moment behind the glass doors of the vestibule, and he added: "Here she is."

"Then you can ask her."

"Easily," said Tony. But when the girl came in he greeted her only with a lively word of thanks for the service she had just rendered; so that the lady of Eastmead, after waiting a minute, took the line of assuming with a certain visible rigour that he might have a reason for making his inquiry without an auditor. Taking temporary leave of him, she mentioned the visitors at home whom she must not forget. "Then you won't come back?" he asked.

"Yes, in an hour or two."

"And bring Miss What's-her-name?"

As Mrs. Beever failed to respond to this, Rose Armiger added her voice. "Yes—do bring Miss What's-her-name." Mrs. Beever, without assenting, reached the door, which Tony had opened for her. Here she paused long enough to be overtaken by the rest of their companion's appeal. "I delight so in her clothes."

"I delight so in her hair!" Tony laughed.

Mrs. Beever looked from one of them to the other.

"Don't you think you've delight enough with what your situation here already offers?" She departed with the private determination to return unaccompanied.

V

THREE minutes later Tony Bream put his question to his other visitor. "Is it true that you know what Julia a while ago had the room cleared in order to say to me?"

Rose hesitated. "Mrs. Beever repeated to you that I told her so?—Yes, then; I probably do know." She waited again a little. "The poor darling announced to you her conviction that she's dying." Then at the face with which he greeted her exactitude: "I haven't needed to be a monster of cunning to guess!" she exclaimed.

He had perceptibly paled: it made a difference, a kind of importance for that absurdity that it was already in other ears. "She has said the same to you?"

Rose gave a pitying smile. "She has done me that honour."

"Do you mean to-day?"

"To-day—and once before."

Tony looked simple in his wonder. "Yesterday?"

Rose hesitated again. "No; before your child was born. Soon after I came."

"She had made up her mind then from the first?"

"Yes," said Rose, with the serenity of superior sense; "she had laid out for herself that pleasant little prospect. She called it a presentiment, a fixed idea."

Tony took this in with a frown. "And you never spoke of it?"

"To you? Why in the world should I—when she herself didn't? I took it perfectly for what it was—an inevitable but unimportant result of the nervous depression produced by her stepmother's visit."

Tony had fidgeted away with his hands in the pockets of his trousers. "Damn her stepmother's visit!"

"That's exactly what I did!" Rose laughed.

"Damn her stepmother too!" the young man angrily pursued.

"Hush!" said the girl soothingly: "we mustn't curse our relations before the Doctor!" Doctor Ramage had come back from his patient, and she mentioned to him that the medicine for which she had gone out would immediately be delivered.

"Many thanks," he replied: "I'll pick it up myself. I *must* run out—to another case." Then with a friendly hand to Tony and a nod at the room he had quitted: "Things are quiet."

Tony, gratefully grasping his hand, detained him by it. "And what was that loud ring that called you?"

"A stupid flurry of Nurse. I was ashamed of her."

"Then why did you stay so long?"

"To have it out with your wife. She wants you again."

Tony eagerly dropped his hand. "Then I go!"

The Doctor raised his liberated member. "In a quarter of an hour—not before. I'm most reluctant, but I allow her five minutes."

"It may make her easier afterwards," Rose observed.

"That's precisely the ground of my giving in. Take care, you know; Nurse will time you," the Doctor said to Tony.

"So many thanks. And you'll come back?"

"The moment I'm free."

When he had gone Tony stood there sombre. "She wants to say it again—that's what she wants."

"Well," Rose answered, "the more she says it the less it's true. It's not she who decides it." †

"No," Tony brooded; "it's not she. But it's not you and I either," he soon went on.

"It's not even the Doctor," Rose remarked with her conscious irony.

Her companion rested his troubled eyes on her. "And yet he's as worried as if it were." She protested against this imputation with a word to which he paid no heed. "If anything should happen"—and his eyes seemed to go as far as his thought—"what on earth do you suppose would become of me?"

The girl looked down, very grave. "Men have borne such things."

"Very badly—the real ones." He seemed to

lose himself in the effort to embrace the worst, to think it out. "What should I do? where should I turn?"

She was silent a little. "You ask me too much!" she helplessly sighed.

"Don't say that," replied Tony, "at a moment when I know so little if I mayn't have to ask you still more!" This exclamation made her meet his eyes with a turn of her own that might have struck him had he not been following another train. "To you I can say it, Rose—she's inexpressibly dear to me."

She showed him a face intensely receptive. "It's for your affection for her that I've really given you mine." Then she shook her head—seemed to shake out, like the overflow of a cup, her generous gaiety. "But be easy. We shan't have loved her so much only to lose her."

"I'll be hanged if we shall!" Tony responded. "And such talk's a vile false note in the midst of a joy like yours."

"Like mine?" Rose exhibited some vagueness.

Her companion was already accessible to the

amusement of it. "I hope that's not the way you mean to look at Mr. Vidal!"

"Ah, Mr. Vidal!" she ambiguously murmured.

"Shan't you then be glad to see him?"

"Intensely glad. But how shall I say it?" She thought a moment and then went on as if she found the answer to her question in Tony's exceptional intelligence and their comfortable intimacy. "There's gladness and gladness. It isn't love's young dream; it's rather an old and rather a sad story. We've worried and waited—we've been acquainted with grief. We've come together a weary way."

"I know you've had a horrid grind. But isn't this the end of it?"

Rose hesitated. "That's just what he's to settle."

"Happily, I see! Just look at him."

The glass doors, as Tony spoke, had been thrown open by the butler. The young man from China was there—a short, meagre young man, with a smooth face and a dark blue double-breasted jacket. "Mr. Vidal!" the butler announced, withdrawing again, while the visitor,

whose entrance had been rapid, suddenly and shyly faltered at the sight of his host. His pause, however, lasted but just long enough to enable Rose to bridge it over with the frankest maidenly grace; and Tony's quick sense of being out of place at this reunion was not a bar to the impression of her charming, instant action, her soft "Dennis, Dennis!" her light, fluttered arms, her tenderly bent head and the short, bright stillness of her clasp of her lover. Tony shone down at them with the pleasure of having helped them, and the warmth of it was in his immediate grasp of the traveller's hand. He cut short his embarrassed thanks—he was too delighted; and leaving him with the remark that he would presently come back to show him his room, he went off again to poor Julia.

VI

DENNIS VIDAL, when the door had closed on his host, drew again to his breast the girl to whom he was plighted and pressed her there with silent joy. She softly submitted, then still more softly disengaged herself, though in his flushed firmness he but partly released her. The light of admiration was in his hard young face—a visible tribute to what she showed again his disaccustomed eyes. Holding her yet, he covered her with a smile that produced two strong but relenting lines on either side of his dry, thin lips. "My own dearest," he murmured, "you're still more so than one remembered!"

She opened her clear eyes wider. "Still more what?"

"Still more of a fright!" And he kissed her again.

"It's you that are wonderful, Dennis," she said; "you look so absurdly young."

He felt with his lean, fine brown hand his spare, clean brown chin. "If I looked as old as I feel, dear girl, they'd have my portrait in the illustrated papers."

He had now drawn her down upon the nearest sofa, and while he sat sideways, grasping the wrist of which he remained in possession after she had liberated her fingers, she leaned back and took him in with a deep air of her own. "And yet it's not that you're exactly childish—or so extraordinarily fresh," she went on as if to puzzle out, for her satisfaction, her impression of him.

"'Fresh,' my dear girl!" He gave a little happy jeer; then he raised her wrist to his mouth and held it there as long as she would let him, looking at her hard. "*That's* the freshest thing I've ever been conscious of!" he exclaimed as she drew away her hand and folded her arms.

"You're worn, but you're not wasted," she brought out in her kind but considering way. "You're awfully well, you know."

"Yes, I'm awfully well, I know"—he spoke with just the faintest ring of impatience. Then he added: "Your voice, all the while, has been in my

ears. But there's something you put into it that *they*—out there, stupid things!—couldn't. Don't 'size me up' so," he continued smiling; "you make me nervous about what I may seem to come to!"

They had both shown shyness, but Rose's was already gone. She kept her inclined position and her folded arms; supported by the back of the sofa, her head preserved, toward the side on which he sat, its charming contemplative turn. "I'm only thinking," she said, "that you look young just as a steel instrument of the best quality, no matter how much it's handled, often looks new."

"Ah, if you mean I'm kept bright by use——!" the young man laughed.

"You're polished by life."

"'Polished' is delightful of you!"

"I'm not sure you've come back handsomer than you went," said Rose, "and I don't know if you've come back richer."

"Then let me immediately tell you I have!" Dennis broke in.

She received the announcement, for a minute, in silence: a good deal more passed between this pair

than they uttered. "What I was going to say," she then quietly resumed, "is that I'm awfully pleased with myself when I see that at any rate you're—what shall I call you?—a made man."

Dennis frowned a little through his happiness. "With 'yourself'? Aren't you a little pleased with me?"

She hesitated. "With myself first, because I was sure of you first."

"Do you mean before I was of you?—I'm somehow not sure of you yet!" the young man declared.

Rose coloured slightly; but she gaily laughed. "Then I'm ahead of you in everything!"

Leaning toward her with all his intensified need of her and holding by his extended arm the top of the sofa-back, he worried with his other hand a piece of her dress, which he had begun to finger for want of something more responsive. "You're as far beyond me still as all the distance I've come." He had dropped his eyes upon the crumple he made in her frock, and her own during that moment, from her superior height, descended upon him with a kind of unseen appeal. When he

looked up again it was gone. "What do you mean by a 'made' man?" he asked.

"Oh, not the usual thing, but the real thing. A man one needn't worry about."

"Thank you! The man not worried about is the man who muffs it."

"That's a horrid, selfish speech," said Rose Armiger. "You don't deserve I should tell you what a success I now feel that you'll be."

"Well, darling," Dennis answered, "that matters the less as I know exactly the occasion on which I shall fully feel it for myself."

Rose manifested no further sense of this occasion than to go straight on with her idea. She placed her arm with frank friendship on his shoulder. It drew him closer, and he recovered his grasp of her free hand. With his want of stature and presence, his upward look at her, his small, smooth head, his seasoned sallowness and simple eyes, he might at this instant have struck a spectator as a figure actually younger and slighter than the ample, accomplished girl whose gesture protected and even a little patronised him. But in her vision of him she none the less clearly found full warrant for

saying, instead of something he expected, something she wished and had her reasons for wishing, even if they represented but the gain of a minute's time. "You're not splendid, my dear old Dennis—you're not dazzling, nor dangerous, nor even exactly distinguished. But you've a quiet little something that the tiresome time has made perfect, and that—just here where you've come to me at last—makes me immensely proud of you!"

She had with this so far again surrendered herself that he could show her in the ways he preferred how such a declaration touched him. The place in which he had come to her at last was of a nature to cause him to look about at it, just as to begin to inquire was to learn from her that he had dropped upon a crisis. He had seen Mrs. Bream, under Rose's wing, in her maiden days; but in his eagerness to jump at a meeting with the only woman really important to him he had perhaps intruded more than he supposed. Though he expressed again the liveliest sense of the kindness of these good people, he was unable to conceal his disappointment at finding their inmate agitated also by something quite distinct from the joy of his

arrival. "Do you really think the poor lady will spoil our fun?" he rather resentfully put it to her.

"It will depend on what our fun may demand of her," said Rose. "If you ask me if she's in danger, I think not quite that: in such a case I must certainly have put you off. I dare say to-day will show the contrary. But she's so much to me—you know how much—that I'm uneasy, quickly upset; and if I seem to you flustered and not myself and not *with* you, I beg you to attribute it simply to the situation in the house."

About this situation they had each more to say, and about many matters besides, for they faced each other over the deep waters of the accumulated and the undiscussed. They could keep no order and for five minutes more they rather helplessly played with the flood. Dennis was rueful at first, for what he seemed to have lighted upon was but half his opportunity; then he had an inspiration which made him say to his companion that they should both, after all, be able to make terms with any awkwardness by simply meeting it with a consciousness that their happiness had already taken form.

"Our happiness?" Rose was all interest.

"Why, the end of our delays."

She smiled with every allowance. "Do you mean we're to go out and be married this minute?"

"Well—almost; as soon as I've read you a letter." He produced, with the words, his pocket-book.

She watched him an instant turn over its contents. "What letter?"

"The best one I ever got. What have I done with it?" On his feet before her, he continued his search.

"From your people?"

"From my people. It met me in town, and it makes everything possible."

She waited while he fumbled in his pockets; with her hands clasped in her lap she sat looking up at him. "Then it's certainly a thing for me to hear."

"But what the dickens have I done with it?" Staring at her, embarrassed, he clapped his hands, on coat and waistcoat, to other receptacles; at the end of a moment of which he had become aware of the proximity of the noiseless butler, upright in the

high detachment of the superior servant who has embraced the conception of unpacking.

"Might I ask you for your keys, sir?"

Dennis Vidal had a light—he smote his forehead.

"Stupid—it's in my portmanteau!"

"Then go and get it!" said Rose, who perceived as she spoke, by the door that faced her, that Tony Bream was rejoining them. She got up, and Tony, agitated, as she could see, but with complete command of his manners, immediately and sociably said to Dennis that he was ready to guide him upstairs. Rose, at this, interposed. "Do let Walker take him—I want to speak to you."

Tony smiled at the young man. "Will you excuse me then?" Dennis protested against the trouble he was giving, and Walker led him away. Rose meanwhile waited not only till they were out of sight and of earshot, but till the return of Tony, who, his hand on Vidal's shoulder, had gone with them as far as the door.

"Has he brought you good news?" said the master of Bounds.

"Very good. He's very well; he's all right."

Tony's flushed face gave to the laugh with which

he greeted this almost the effect of that of a man who had been drinking. "Do you mean he's quite faithful?"

Rose always met a bold joke. "As faithful as I! But your news is the thing."

"Mine?" He closed his eyes a moment, but stood there scratching his head as if to carry off with a touch of comedy his betrayal of emotion.

"Has Julia repeated her declaration?"

Tony looked at her in silence. "She has done something more extraordinary than that," he replied at last.

"What has she done?"

Tony glanced round him, then dropped into a chair. He covered his face with his hands. "I must get over it a little before I tell you!"

VII

SHE waited compassionately for his nervousness to pass, dropping again, during the pause, upon the sofa she had just occupied with her visitor. At last as, while she watched him, his silence continued, she put him a question. "Does she at any rate still maintain that she shan't get well?"

Tony removed his hands from his face. "With the utmost assurance—or rather with the utmost serenity. But she treats that now as a mere detail."

Rose wondered. "You mean she's really convinced that she's sinking?"

"So she says."

"But *is* she, good heavens? Such a thing isn't a matter of opinion: it's a fact or it's not a fact."

"It's not a fact," said Tony Bream. "How can it be when one has only to see that her strength hasn't failed? She of course says it has, but she

has a remarkable deal of it to show. What's the vehemence with which she expresses herself but a sign of increasing life? It's excitement, of course—partly; but it's also striking energy."

"Excitement?" Rose repeated. "I thought you just said she was 'serene.'"

Tony hesitated, but he was perfectly clear. "She's calm about what she calls leaving me, bless her heart; she seems to have accepted that prospect with the strangest resignation. What she's uneasy, what she's in fact still more strangely tormented and exalted about, is another matter."

"I see—the thing you just mentioned."

"She takes an interest," Tony went on, "she asks questions, she sends messages, she speaks out with all her voice. She's delighted to know that Mr. Vidal has at last come to you, and she told me to tell you so from her, and to tell *him* so—to tell you both, in fact, how she rejoices that what you've so long waited for is now so close at hand."

Rose took this in with lowered eyes. "How dear of her!" she murmured.

"She asked me particularly about Mr. Vidal," Tony continued—"how he looks, how he strikes me,

how you met. She gave me indeed a private message for him."

Rose faintly smiled. "A private one?"

"Oh, only to spare your modesty: a word to the effect that she answers for you."

"In what way?" Rose asked.

"Why, as the charmingest, cleverest, handsomest, in every way most wonderful wife that ever any man will have had."

"She is wound up!" Rose laughed. Then she said: "And all the while what does Nurse think?—I don't mean," she added with the same slight irony, "of whether I shall do for Dennis."

"Of Julia's condition? She wants Ramage to come back."

Rose thought a moment. "She's rather a goose, I think—she loses her head."

"So I've taken the liberty of telling her." Tony sat forward, his eyes on the floor, his elbows on his knees and his hands nervously rubbing each other. Presently he rose with a jerk. "What do you suppose she wants me to do?"

Rose tried to suppose. "Nurse wants you——?"

"No—that ridiculous girl." Nodding back at

his wife's room, he came and stood before the sofa.

Half reclining again, Rose turned it over, raising her eyes to him. "Do you really mean something ridiculous?"

"Under the circumstances—grotesque."

"Well," Rose suggested, smiling, "she wants you to allow her to name her successor."

"Just the contrary!" Tony seated himself where Dennis Vidal had sat. "She wants me to promise her she shall *have* no successor."

His companion looked at him hard; with her surprise at something in his tone she had just visibly coloured. "I see." She was at a momentary loss. "Do you call that grotesque?"

Tony, for an instant, was evidently struck by her surprise; then seeing the reason of it and blushing too a little, "Not the idea, my dear Rose—God forbid!" he exclaimed. "What I'm speaking of is the mistake of giving that amount of colour to her insistence—meeting her as if one accepted the situation as she represents it and were really taking leave of her."

Rose appeared to understand and even to be

impressed. "You think that will make her worse?"

"Why, arranging everything as if she's going to die!" Tony sprang up afresh; his trouble was obvious and he fell into the restless pacing that had been his resource all the morning.

His interlocutress watched his agitation. "Mayn't it be that if you do just that she'll, on the contrary, immediately find herself better?"

Tony wandered, again scratching his head. "From the spirit of contradiction? I'll do anything in life that will make her happy, or just simply make her quiet: I'll treat her demand as intensely reasonable even, if it isn't better to treat it as an ado about nothing. But it stuck in my crop to lend myself, that way, to a death-bed solemnity. Heaven deliver us!" Half irritated and half anxious, suffering from his tenderness a twofold effect, he dropped into another seat with his hands in his pockets and his long legs thrust out.

"Does she wish it very solemn?" Rose asked.

"She's in dead earnest, poor darling. She wants a promise on my sacred honour—a vow of the most portentous kind."

Rose was silent a little. "You didn't give it?"

"I turned it off—I refused to take any such discussion seriously. I said: 'My own darling, how can I meet you on so hateful a basis? Wait till you *are* dying!'" He lost himself an instant; then he was again on his feet. "How in the world can she dream I'm capable ——?" He hadn't patience even to finish his phrase.

Rose, however, finished it. "Of taking a second wife? Ah, that's another affair!" she sadly exclaimed. "We've nothing to do with that," she added. "Of course you understand poor Julia's feeling."

"Her feeling?" Tony once more stood in front of her.

"Why, what's at the bottom of her dread of your marrying again."

"Assuredly I do! Mrs. Grantham naturally—*she's* at the bottom. She has filled Julia with the vision of my perhaps giving our child a step-mother."

"Precisely," Rose said, "and if you had known, as I knew it, Julia's girlhood, you would do justice to the force of that horror. It possesses her whole

being—she would prefer that the child should die.”

Tony Bream, musing, shook his head with dark decision. “Well, I would prefer that they neither of them should !”

“The simplest thing, then, is to give her your word.”

“My ‘word’ isn’t enough,” Tony said: “she wants mystic rites and spells ! The simplest thing, moreover, was exactly what I desired to do. My objection to the performance she demands was that this was just what it seemed to me not to be.”

“Try it,” said Rose, smiling.

“To bring her round ?”

“Before the Doctor returns. When he comes, you know, he won’t let you go back to her.”

“Then I’ll go now,” said Tony, already at the door.

Rose had risen from the sofa. “Be very brief—but be very strong.”

“I’ll swear by all the gods—that or any other nonsense.” Rose stood there opposite to him with a fine, rich urgency which operated as a detention.

“I see you’re right,” he declared. “You always

are, and I'm always indebted to you." Then as he opened the door: "Is there anything else?"

"Anything else?"

"I mean that you advise."

She thought a moment. "Nothing but that—for you to seem to enter thoroughly into her idea, to show her you understand it as she understands it herself."

Tony looked vague. "As she does?"

"Why, for the lifetime of your daughter." As he appeared still not fully to apprehend, she risked: "If you should lose Effie the reason would fail."

Tony, at this, jerked back his head with a flush. "My dear Rose, you don't imagine that it's as a *needed* vow——"

"That you would give it?" she broke in. "Certainly I don't, any more than I suppose the degree of your fidelity to be the ground on which we're talking. But the thing is to convince Julia, and I said that only because she'll be more convinced if you strike her as really looking at what you subscribe to."

Tony gave his nervous laugh. "Don't you know

I always 'put down my name'—especially to 'appeals'—in the most reckless way?" Then abruptly, in a different tone, as if with a passionate need to make it plain, "I shall never, never, never," he protested, "so much as look at another woman!"

The girl approved with an eager gesture. "You've got it, my dear Tony. Say it to her *that* way!" But he had already gone, and, turning, she found herself face to face with her lover, who had come back as she spoke.

VIII

WITH his letter in his hand Dennis Vidal stood and smiled at her. "What in the world has your dear Tony 'got,' and what is he to say?"

"To say? Something to his wife, who appears to have lashed herself into an extraordinary state."

The young man's face fell. "What sort of a state?"

"A strange discouragement about herself. She's depressed and frightened—she thinks she's sinking."

Dennis looked grave. "Poor little lady—what a bore for *us*! I remember her perfectly."

"She of course remembers you," Rose said. "She takes the friendliest interest in your being here."

"That's most kind of her in her condition."

"Oh, her condition," Rose returned, "isn't quite so bad as she thinks."

"I see." Dennis hesitated. "And that's what Mr. Bream's to tell her."

"That's a part of it." Rose glanced at the document he had brought to her; it was in its envelope, and he tapped it a little impatiently on his left finger-tips. What she said, however, had no reference to it. "She's haunted with a morbid alarm—on the subject, of all things, of his marrying again."

"If she should die? She wants him not to?" Dennis asked.

"She wants him not to." Rose paused a moment. "She wants to have been the only one."

He reflected, slightly embarrassed with this peep into a situation that but remotely concerned him. "Well, I suppose that's the way women often feel."

"I daresay it is." The girl's gravity gave the gleam of a smile. "I daresay it's the way *I* should."

Dennis Vidal, at this, simply seized her and kissed her. "You needn't be afraid—you'll be the only one!"

His embrace had been the work of a few seconds, and she had made no movement to escape from it;

but she looked at him as if to convey that the extreme high spirits it betrayed were perhaps just a trifle mistimed. "That's what I recommended him," she dropped, "to say to Julia."

"Why, I should hope so!" Presently, as if a little struck, Dennis continued: "Doesn't he want to?"

"Absolutely. They're all in all to each other. But he's naturally much upset and bewildered."

"And he came to you for advice?"

"Oh, he comes to me," Rose said, "as he might come to talk of her with the mother that, poor darling, it's her misfortune never to have known."

The young man's vivacity again played up. "He treats you, you mean, as his mother-in-law?"

"Very much. But I'm thoroughly nice to him. People can do anything to me who are nice to Julia."

Dennis was silent a moment; he had slipped his letter out of its cover. "Well, I hope they're grateful to you for such devotion."

"Grateful to me, Dennis? They quite adore me." Then as if to remind him of something it

was important he should feel: "Don't you see what it is for a poor girl to have such an anchorage as this—such honourable countenance, such a place to fall back upon?"

Thus challenged, her visitor, with a moment's thought, did frank justice to her question. "I'm certainly glad you've such jolly friends—one sees they're charming people. It has been a great comfort to me lately to know you were with them." He looked round him, conscientiously, at the bright and beautiful hall. "It *is* a good berth, my dear, and it must be a pleasure to live with such fine things. They've given me a room up there that's full of them—an awfully nice room." He glanced at a picture or two—he took in the scene. "Do they roll in wealth?"

"They're like all bankers, I imagine," said Rose. "Don't bankers always roll?"

"Yes, they seem literally to wallow. What a pity *we* ain't bankers, eh?"

"Ah, with my friends here their money's the least part of them," the girl answered. "The great thing's their personal goodness."

Dennis had stopped before a large photograph, a

great picture in a massive frame, supported, on a table, by a small gilded easel. "To say nothing of their personal beauty! He's tremendously good-looking."

Rose glanced with an indulgent sigh at a representation of Tony Bream in all his splendour, in a fine white waistcoat and a high white hat, with a stick and gloves and a cigar, his orchid, his stature and his smile. "Ah, poor Julia's taste!"

"Yes," Dennis exclaimed, "one can see how he must have fetched her!"

"I mean the style of the thing," said Rose.

"It isn't good, eh? Well, *you* know." Then turning away from the picture, the young man added: "They'll be after that fellow!"

Rose faltered. "The people she fears?"

"The women-folk, bless 'em—if he should lose her."

"I daresay," said Rose. "But he'll be proof."

"Has he told you so?" Dennis smiled.

She met his smile with a kind of conscious bravado in her own. "In so many words. But he assures me he'll calm her down."

Dennis was silent a little : he had now unfolded his letter and run his eyes over it. "What a funny subject for him to be talking about !"

"With me, do you mean ?"

"Yes, and with his wife."

"My dear man," Rose exclaimed, "you can imagine he didn't begin it !"

"Did *you* ?" her companion asked.

She hesitated again, and then, "Yes—idiot !" she replied with a quiet humour that produced, on his part, another demonstration of tenderness. This attempt she arrested, raising her hand, as she appeared to have heard a sound, with a quick injunction to listen.

"What's the matter ?"

"She bent her ear. "Wasn't there a cry from Julia's room ?"

"I heard nothing."

Rose was relieved. "Then it's only my nervousness."

Dennis Vidal held up his letter. "Is your nervousness too great to prevent your giving a moment's attention to this ?"

"Ah, your letter !" Rose's eyes rested on it as



if she had become conscious of it for the first time.

"It very intimately concerns our future," said her visitor. "I went up for it so that you should do me the favour to read it."

She held out her hand promptly and frankly. "Then give it to me—let me keep it a little."

"Certainly; but kindly remember that I've still to answer it—I mean referring to points. I've waited to see you because it's from the 'governor' himself—practically saying what he'll do for me."

Rose held the letter; her large light eyes widened with her wonder and her sympathy. "Is it something very good?"

Dennis prescribed, with an emphatic but amused nod at the paper, a direction to her curiosity. "Read and you'll see!"

She dropped her eyes, but after a moment, while her left hand patted her heart, she raised them with an odd, strained expression. "I mean is it really good enough?"

"That's exactly what I want you to tell me!" Dennis laughed out. A certain surprise at her manner was in his face.

While she noted it she heard a sound again, a sound this time explained by the opening of the door of the vestibule. Doctor Ramage had come back ; Rose put down her letter. " I'll tell you as soon as I have spoken to the Doctor."

IX

THE Doctor, eagerly, spoke to her first. "Our friend has not come back?"

"Mine has," said Rose with grace. "Let me introduce Mr. Vidal." Doctor Ramage beamed a greeting, and our young lady, with her discreet gaiety, went on to Dennis: "He too thinks all the world of me."

"Oh, she's a wonder—she knows what to do! But you'll see that for yourself," said the Doctor.

"I'm afraid you won't approve of me," Dennis replied with solicitude. "You'll think me rather in your patient's way."

Doctor Ramage laughed. "No indeed—I'm sure Miss Armiger will keep you out of it." Then looking at his watch, "Bream's not with her still?" he inquired of Rose.

"He came away, but he returned to her."

"He shouldn't have done that."

"It was by my advice, and I'm sure you'll find it's all right," Rose returned. "But you'll send him back to us."

"On the spot." The Doctor picked his way out.

"He's not at all easy," Dennis pronounced when he had gone.

Rose demurred. "How do you know that?"

"By looking at him. I'm not such a fool," her visitor added with some emphasis, "as you strike me as wishing to make of me."

Rose candidly stared. "As I strike you as wishing——?" For a moment this young couple looked at each other hard, and they both changed colour. "My dear Dennis, what do you mean?"

He evidently felt that he had been almost violently abrupt; but it would have been equally evident to a spectator that he was a man of cool courage. "I mean, Rose, that I don't quite know what's the matter with you. It's as if, unexpectedly, on my eager arrival, I find something or other between us."

She appeared immensely relieved. "Why, my dear child, of course you do! Poor Julia's between us—much between us." She faltered again; then

she broke out with emotion: "I may as well confess it frankly—I'm miserably anxious. Good heavens," she added with impatience, "don't you see it for yourself?"

"I certainly see that you're agitated and absent—as you warned me so promptly you would be. But remember you've quite denied to me the gravity of Mrs. Bream's condition."

Rose's impatience overflowed into a gesture. "I've been doing that to deceive my own self!"

"I understand," said Dennis kindly. "Still," he went on, considering, "it's either one thing or the other. The poor lady's either dying, you know, or she ain't!"

His friend looked at him with a reproach too fine to be uttered. "My dear Dennis—you're rough!"

He showed a face as conscientious as it was blank. "I'm crude—possibly coarse? Perhaps I *am*—without intention."

"Think what these people are to me," said Rose.

He was silent a little. "Is it anything so very extraordinary? Oh, I know," he went on, as if he feared she might again accuse him of a want

of feeling; "I appreciate them perfectly—I do them full justice. Enjoying their hospitality here, I'm conscious of all their merits." The letter she had put down was still on the table, and he took it up and fingered it a moment. "All I mean is that I don't want you quite to sink the fact that I'm something to you too."

She met this appeal with instant indulgence. "Be a little patient with me," she gently said. Before he could make a rejoinder she pursued: "You yourself are impressed with the Doctor's being anxious. I've been trying not to think so, but I daresay you're right. There I've another worry."

"The greater your worry, then, the more pressing our business." Dennis spoke with cordial decision, while Rose, moving away from him, reached the door by which the Doctor had gone out. She stood there as if listening, and he continued: "It's *me*, you know, that you've now to 'fall back' upon."

She had already raised a hand with her clear "Hush!" and she kept her eyes on her companion while she tried to catch a sound. "The

Doctor said he would send him out of the room. But he doesn't."

"All the better—for your reading this." Dennis held out the letter to her.

She quitted her place. "If he's allowed to stay, there must be something wrong."

"I'm very sorry for them; but don't you call that a statement?"

"Ah, your letter?" Her attention came back to it, and, taking it from him, she dropped again upon the sofa with it. "*Voyons, voyons* this great affair!"—she had the air of trying to talk herself into calmness.

Dennis stood a moment before her. "It puts us on a footing that really seems to me sound."

She had turned over the leaf to take the measure of the document; there were three, large, close, neat pages. "He's a trifle long-winded, the 'governor'!"

"The longer the better," Dennis laughed, "when it's all in *that* key! Read it, my dear, quietly and carefully; take it in—it's really simple enough." He spoke soothingly and tenderly, turning off to give her time and not oppress her. He moved

slowly about the hall, whistling very faintly and looking again at the pictures, and when he had left her she followed him a minute with her eyes. Then she transferred them to the door at which she had just listened; instead of reading she watched as if for a movement of it. If there had been any one at that moment to see her face, such an observer would have found it strangely, tragically convulsed: she had the appearance of holding in with extraordinary force some passionate sob or cry, some smothered impulse of anguish. This appearance vanished miraculously as Dennis turned at the end of the room, and what he saw, while the great showy clock ticked in the scented stillness, was only his friend's study of what he had put before her. She studied it long, she studied it in silence—a silence so unbroken by inquiry or comment that, though he clearly wished not to seem to hurry her, he drew nearer again at last and stood as if waiting for some sign.

“Don't you call that really meeting a fellow?”

“I must read it again,” Rose replied without looking up. She turned afresh to the beginning, and he strolled away once more. She went

through to the end; after which she said with tranquillity, folding the letter: "Yes; it shows what they think of you." She put it down where she had put it before, getting up as he came back to her. "It's good not only for what he says, but for the way he says it."

"It's a jolly bit more than I expected." Dennis picked the letter up and, restoring it to its envelope, slipped it almost lovingly into a breast-pocket. "It does show, I think, that they don't want to lose me."

"They're not such fools!" Rose had in her turn moved off, but now she faced him, so intensely pale that he was visibly startled; all the more that it marked still more her white grimace. "My dear boy, it's a splendid future."

"I'm glad it strikes you so!" he laughed.

"It's a great joy—you're all right. As I said a while ago, you're a made man."

"Then by the same token, of course, you're a made woman!"

"I'm very, very happy about you," she brightly conceded. "The great thing is that there's more to come."

"Rather—there's more to come!" said Dennis. He stood meeting her singular smile. "I'm only waiting for it."

"I mean there's a lot behind—a general attitude. Read between the lines!"

"Don't you suppose I *have*, miss? I didn't venture, myself, to say that to you."

"Do I have so to be prompted and coached?" asked Rose. "I don't believe you even see all I mean. There are hints and tacit promises—glimpses of what may happen if you'll give them time."

"Oh, I'll give them time!" Dennis declared. "But he's really awfully cautious. You're sharp to have made out so much."

"Naturally—I'm sharp." Then, after an instant, "Let me have the letter again," the girl said, holding out her hand. Dennis promptly drew it forth, and she took it and went over it in silence once more. He turned away as he had done before, to give her a chance; he hummed slowly, to himself, about the room, and once more, at the end of some minutes, it appeared to strike him that she prolonged her perusal. But when he

approached her again she was ready with her clear contentment. She folded the letter and handed it back to him. "Oh, you'll do!" she proclaimed.

"You're really quite satisfied?"

She hesitated a moment. "For the present—perfectly." Her eyes were on the precious document as he fingered it, and something in his way of doing so made her break into incongruous gaiety. He had opened it delicately and been caught again by a passage. "You handle it as if it were a thousand-pound note!"

He looked up at her quickly. "It's much more than that. Capitalise his figure."

" 'Capitalise' it?"

"Find the invested sum."

Rose thought a moment. "Oh, I'll do everything for you but cipher! But it's millions." Then as he returned the letter to his pocket she added: "You should have that thing mounted in double glass—with a little handle like a hand-screen."

"There's certainly nothing too good for the charter of our liberties—for that's what it really

is," Dennis said. "But you *can* face the music?" he went on.

"The music?"—Rose was momentarily blank.

He looked at her hard again. "You have, my dear, the most extraordinary vacancies. The figure we're talking of—the poor, dear little figure. The five-hundred-and-forty," he a trifle sharply explained. "That's about what it makes."

"Why, it seems to me a lovely little figure," said the girl. "To the 'likes' of me, how can that be anything but a duck of an income? Then," she exclaimed, "think also of what's to come!"

"Yes—but I'm not speaking of anything you may bring."

Rose wavered, judicious, as if trying to be as attentive as he desired. "I see—without that. But I wasn't speaking of that either," she added.

"Oh, *you* may count it—I only mean I don't touch it. And the going out—you take that too?" Dennis asked.

Rose looked brave. "Why it's only for two years."

He flushed suddenly, as with a flood of reassurance, putting his arms round her as round

the fulfilment of his dream. "Ah, my own old girl!"

She let him clasp her again, but when she disengaged herself they were somehow nearer to the door that led away to Julia Bream. She stood there as she had stood before, while he still held one of her hands; then she brought forth something that betrayed an extraordinary disconnection from all that had just preceded. "I can't make out why he doesn't send him back!"

Dennis Vidal dropped her hand; both his own went into his pockets, and he gave a kick to the turned-up corner of a rug. "Mr. Bream—the Doctor? Oh, they know what they're about!"

"The doctor doesn't at all want him to be there. Something has happened," Rose declared as she left the door.

Her companion said nothing for a moment. "Do you mean the poor lady's gone?" he at last demanded.

"Gone?" Rose echoed.

"Do you mean Mrs. Bream is dead?"

His question rang out so that Rose threw herself back in horror. "Dennis—God forbid!"

"God forbid too, I say. But one doesn't know what you mean—you're too difficult to follow. One thing, at any rate, you clearly have in your head—that we must take it as possibly on the cards. That's enough to make it remarkably to the point to remind you of the great change that would take place in your situation if she *should* die."

"What else in the world but that change am I thinking of?" Rose asked.

"You're not thinking of it perhaps so much in the connection I refer to. If Mrs. Bream goes, your 'anchorage,' as you call it, goes."

"I see what you mean." She spoke with the softest assent; the tears had sprung into her eyes and she looked away to hide them.

"One may have the highest possible opinion of her husband and yet not quite see you staying on here in the same manner with *him*."

Rose was silent, with a certain dignity. "Not quite," she presently said with the same gentleness.

"The way therefore to provide against everything is—as I remarked to you a while ago—to

settle with me this minute the day, the nearest one possible, for our union to become a reality."

She slowly brought back her troubled eyes. "The day to marry you?"

"The day to marry me of course!" He gave a short, uneasy laugh. "What else?"

She waited again, and there was a fear deep in her face. "I must settle it this minute?"

Dennis stared. "Why, my dear child, when in the world if not now?"

"You can't give me a little more time?" she asked.

"More time?" His gathered stupefaction broke out. "More time—after giving you years?"

"Ah, but just at the last, here—this news, this rush is sudden."

"Sudden!" Dennis repeated. "Haven't you known I was coming, and haven't you known for what?"

She looked at him now with an effort of resolution in which he could see her white face harden; as if by a play of some inner mechanism something dreadful had taken place in it. Then she said with a painful quaver that no attempt to be

natural could keep down : " Let me remind you Dennis, that your coming was not at my request. You've come—yes ; but you've come because you would. You've come in spite of me."

He gasped, and with the mere touch of her tone his own eyes filled. " You haven't wanted me ? "

" I'm delighted to see you."

" Then in God's name what do you mean ? Where *are* we, and what are you springing on me ? "

" I'm only asking you again, as I've asked you already, to be patient with me—to let me, at such a critical hour, turn round. I'm only asking you to bear with me—I'm only asking you to wait."

" To wait for what ? " He snatched the words out of her mouth. " It's because I *have* waited that I'm here. What I want of you is three simple words—that you can utter in three simple seconds." He looked about him, in his helpless dismay, as if to call the absent to witness. " And you look at me like a stone. You open up an abyss. You give me nothing, nothing." He paused, as it were, for a contradiction, but she made none ; she had lowered her eyes and, supported against a table, stood there

rigid and passive. Dennis sank into a chair with his vain hands upon his knees. "What do you mean by my coming in spite of you? You never asked me not to—you've treated me well till now. It was my idea—yes; but you perfectly accepted it." He gave her time to assent to this or to deny it, but she took none, and he continued: "Don't you understand the one feeling that has possessed me and sustained me? Don't you understand that I've thought of nothing else every hour of my way? I arrived here with a longing for you that words can't utter; and now I see—though I couldn't immediately be sure—that I found you from the first constrained and unnatural."

Rose, as he went on, had raised her eyes again; they seemed to follow his words in sombre submission. "Yes, you must have found me strange enough."

"And don't again say it's your being anxious——!" Dennis sprang up warningly. "It's your being anxious that just makes my right."

His companion shook her head slowly and ambiguously. "I *am* glad you've come."

"To have the pleasure of not receiving me?"

"I have received you," Rose replied. "Every word I've spoken to you and every satisfaction I've expressed is true, is deep. I do admire you, I do respect you, I'm proud to have been your friend. Haven't I assured you of my pure joy in your promotion and your prospects?"

"What do you call assuring me? You utterly misled me for some strange moments; you mystified me; I think I may say you trifled with me. The only assurance I'm open to is that of your putting your hand in mine as my wife. In God's name," the young man panted, "what has happened to you and what has changed you?"

"I'll tell you to-morrow," said Rose.

"Tell me what I insist on?"

She cast about her. "Tell you things I can't now."

He sounded her with visible despair. "You're not sincere—you're not straight. You've nothing to tell me, and you're afraid. You're only gaining time, and you've only been doing so from the first. I don't know what it's for—you're beyond me; but if it's to back out I'll be hanged if I give you a moment."

Her wan face, at this, showed a faint flush ; it seemed to him five years older than when he came in. "You take, with your cruel accusations, a strange way to keep me !" the girl exclaimed. "But I won't talk to you in bitterness," she pursued in a different tone. "That will drop if we do allow it a day or two." Then on a sharp motion of his impatience she added: "Whether you allow it or not, you know, I must take the time I need."

He was angry now, as if she were not only proved evasion, but almost proved insolence ; and his anger deepened at her return to this appeal that offered him no meaning. "No, no, you must choose," he said with passion, "and if you're really honest you will. I'm here for you with all my soul, but I'm here for you now or never."

"Dennis !" she weakly murmured.

"You do back out ?"

She put out her hand. "Good-bye."

He looked at her as over a flood ; then he thrust his hand behind him and glanced about for his hat. He moved blindly, like a man picking himself up from a violent fall—flung indeed suddenly from a smooth, swift vehicle. "Good-bye."

X

HE quickly remembered that he had not brought in his hat, and also, the next instant, that even to clap it on wouldn't under the circumstances qualify him for immediate departure from Bounds. Just as it came over him that the obligation he had incurred must keep him at least for the day, he found himself in the presence of his host, who, while his back was turned, had precipitately reappeared and whose vision of the place had resulted in an instant question.

"Mrs. Beever has not come back? Julia wants her—Julia must see her!"

Dennis was separated by the width of the hall from the girl with whom he had just enjoyed such an opportunity of reunion, but there was for the moment no indication that Tony Bream, engrossed with a graver accident, found a betrayal in the space between them. He had, however, for Dennis the prompt effect of a reminder to take care: it was a

consequence of the very nature of the man that to look at him was to recognise the value of appearances and that he couldn't have dropped upon any scene, however disordered, without, by the simple fact, re-establishing a superficial harmony. His new friend met him with a movement that might have been that of stepping in front of some object to hide it, while Rose, on her side, sounding out like a touched bell, was already alert with her response. "Ah," said Dennis, to himself, "it's for *them* she cares!"

"She has not come back, but if there's a hurry——"
Rose was all there.

"There *is* a hurry. Some one must go for her."

Dennis had a point to make that he must make on the spot. He spoke before Rose's rejoinder. "With your increasing anxieties, Mr. Bream, I'm quite ashamed to be quartered on you. Hadn't I really better be at the inn?"

"At the inn—to go from here? My dear fellow, are you mad?" Tony sociably scoffed; he wouldn't hear of it. "Don't be afraid; we've plenty of use for you—if only to keep this young woman quiet."

"He can be of use this instant." Rose looked at her suitor as if there were not the shadow of a cloud

between them. "The servants are getting luncheon. Will *you* go over for Mrs. Beever?"

"Ah," Tony demurred, laughing, "we mustn't make him fetch and carry!"

Dennis showed a momentary blankness and then, in his private discomposure, jumped at the idea of escaping from the house and into the air. "Do employ me," he pleaded. "I want to stretch my legs—I'll do anything."

"Since you're so kind, then, and it's so near," Tony replied. "Mrs. Beever's our best friend, and always the friend of our friends, and she's only across the river."

"Just six minutes," said Rose, "by the short way. Bring her back with you."

"The short way," Tony pressingly explained, "is through my garden and out of it by the gate on the river."

"At the river you turn to the right—the little foot-bridge is *her* bridge," Rose went on.

"You pass the gatehouse—empty and closed—at the other side of it, and there you are," said Tony.

"In her garden—it's lovely. Tell her it's for Mrs. Bream and it's important," Rose added.

"My wife's calling aloud for her!" Tony laid his hand, with his flushed laugh, on the young man's shoulder.

Dennis had listened earnestly, looking at his companions in turn. "It doesn't matter if she doesn't know in the least who I am?"

"She knows perfectly—don't be shy!" Rose familiarly exclaimed.

Tony gave him a great pat on the back which sent him off. "She has even something particular to say to you! She takes a great interest in his relations with you," he continued to Rose as the door closed behind their visitor. Then meeting in her face a certain impatience of any supersession of the question of Julia's state, he added, to justify his allusion, a word accompanied by the same excited laugh that had already broken from him. "Mrs. Beever deprecates the idea of any further delay in your marriage and thinks you've got quite enough to 'set up' on. She pronounces your means remarkably adequate."

"What does she know about our means?" Rose coldly asked.

"No more, doubtless, than I! But that needn't

prevent her. It's the wish that's father to the thought. That's the result of her general goodwill to you."

"She has no goodwill of any sort to me. She doesn't like me." Rose spoke with marked dryness, in which moreover a certain surprise at the direction of her friend's humour was visible. Tony was now completely out of his groove; they indeed both were, though Rose was for the moment more successful in concealing her emotion. Still vibrating with the immense effort of the morning and particularly of the last hour, she could yet hold herself hard and observe what was taking place in her companion. He had been through something that had made his nerves violently active, so that his measure of security, of reality almost, was merged in the mere sense of the unusual. It was precisely this evidence of what he had been through that helped the girl's curiosity to preserve a waiting attitude—the firm surface she had triumphantly presented to each of the persons whom, from an early hour, she had had to encounter. But Tony had now the air of not intending to reward her patience by a fresh communication; it was as if some new delicacy had operated and he had struck

himself as too explicit. He had looked astonished at her judgment of the lady of Eastmead.

"My dear Rose," he said, "I think you're greatly mistaken. Mrs. Beever much appreciates you."

She was silent at first, showing him a face worn with the ingenuity of all that in her interview with Dennis Vidal she had had to keep out of it and put into it. "My dear Tony," she then blandly replied, "I've never known any one like you for not having two grains of observation. I've known people with only a little; but a little's a poor affair. You've absolutely none at all, and that, for your character, is the right thing: it's magnificent and perfect."

Tony greeted this with real hilarity. "I like a good square one between the eyes!"

"You can't like it as much as I like you for being just as you are. Observation's a second-rate thing; it's only a precaution—the refuge of the small and the timid. It protects our own ridicules and props up our defences. You may have ridicules—I don't say so; but you've no suspicions and no fears and no doubts; you're natural and generous and easy——"

"And beautifully, exquisitely stupid!" Tony

broke in. "'Natural'—thank you! Oh, the horrible people who are natural! What you mean—only you're too charming to say it—is that I'm so utterly taken up with my own interests and feelings that I pipe about them like a canary in a cage. Not to have the things you mention, and above all not to have imagination, is simply not to have tact, than which nothing is more unforgivable and more loathsome. What lovelier proof of my selfishness could I be face to face with than the fact—which I immediately afterwards blushed for—that, coming in to you here a while ago, in the midst of something so important to you, I hadn't the manners to ask you so much as a question about it?"

"Do you mean about Mr. Vidal—after he had gone to his room? You did ask me a question," Rose said; "but you had a subject much more interesting to speak of." She waited an instant before adding: "You spoke of something I haven't ceased to think of." This gave Tony a chance for reference to his discharge of the injunction she had then laid upon him; as a reminder of which Rose further observed: "There's plenty of time for Mr. Vidal."

"I hope indeed he's going to stay. I like his looks immensely," Tony responded. "I like his type; it matches so with what you've told me of him. It's the real thing—I wish we had him here." Rose, at this, gave a small, confused cry, and her host went on: "Upon my honour I do—I know a man when I see him. He's just the sort of fellow I personally should have liked to be."

"You mean *you're* not the real thing?" Rose asked.

It was a question of a kind that Tony's good-nature, shining out almost splendidly even through trouble, could always meet with princely extravagance. "Not a bit! I'm bolstered up with all sorts of little appearances and accidents. Your friend there has his feet on the rock." This picture of her friend's position moved Rose to another vague sound—the effect of which, in turn, was to make Tony look at her more sharply. But he appeared not to impute to her any doubt of his assertion, and after an instant he reverted, with a jump, to a matter that he evidently wished not to drop. "You must really, you know, do justice to Mrs. Beever. When she dislikes one it's not a question of shades or degrees.

She's not an underhand enemy—she very soon lets one know it."

"You mean by something she says or does?"

Tony considered a moment. "I mean she gives you her reasons—she's eminently direct. And I'm sure she has never lifted a finger against you."

"Perhaps not. But she will," said Rose. "You yourself just gave me the proof."

Tony wondered. "What proof?"

"Why, in telling Dennis that she had told you she has something special to say to him."

Tony recalled it—it had already passed out of his mind. "What she has to say is only what I myself have already said for the rest of us—that she hopes with all her heart things are now smooth for his marriage."

"Well, what could be more horrid than that?"

"More horrid?" Tony stared.

"What has she to do with his marriage? Her interference is in execrable taste."

The girl's tone was startling, and her companion's surprise augmented, showing itself in his lighted eyes and deepened colour. "My dear Rose, isn't that sort of thing, in a little circle like ours, a

permitted joke—a friendly compliment? We're all so *with* you."

She had turned away from him. She went on, as if she had not heard him, with a sudden tremor in her voice—the tremor of a deep upheaval: "Why does she give opinions that nobody wants or asks her for? What does she know of our relations or of what difficulties and mysteries she touches? Why can't she leave us alone—at least for the first hour?"

Embarrassment was in Tony's gasp—the unexpected had sprung up before him. He could only stammer after her as she moved away: "Bless my soul, my dear child—you don't mean to say there *are* difficulties? Of course it's no one's business—but one hoped you were in quiet waters." Across her interval, as he spoke, she suddenly faced round, and his view of her, with this, made him smite his forehead in his penitent, expressive way. "What a brute I am not to have seen you're not quite happy, and not to have noticed that *he*——!" Tony caught himself up; the face offered him was the convulsed face that had not been offered Dennis Vidal. Rose literally glared at him; she stood there with her two

hands on her heaving breast and something in all her aspect that was like the first shock of a great accident. What he saw, without understanding it, was the final snap of her tremendous tension, the end of her wonderful false calm. He misunderstood it in fact, as he saw it give way before him: he sprang at the idea that the poor girl had received a blow—a blow which her self-control up to within a moment only presented as more touchingly borne. Vidal's absence was there as a part of it: the situation flashed into vividness. "His eagerness to leave you surprised me," he exclaimed, "and yours to make him go!" Tony thought again, and before he spoke his thought her eyes seemed to glitter it back. "He has not brought you bad news—he has not failed of what we hoped?" He went to her with compassion and tenderness: "You don't mean to say, my poor girl, that he doesn't meet you as you supposed he would?" Rose dropped, as he came, into a chair; she had burst into passionate tears. She threw herself upon a small table, burying her head in her arms, while Tony, all wonder and pity, stood above her and felt helpless as she sobbed. She seemed to have sunk under her wrong and to

quiver with her pain. Her host, with his own recurrent pang, could scarcely bear it: he felt a sharp need of making some one pay. "You don't mean to say Mr. Vidal doesn't keep faith?"

"Oh, God! oh, God! oh, God!" Rose Armiger wailed.

XI

TONY turned away from her with a movement which was a confession of incompetence ; a sense moreover of the awkwardness of being so close to a grief for which he had no direct remedy. He could only assure her, in his confusion, of his deep regret that she had had a distress. The extremity of her collapse, however, was brief, a gust of passion after which she instantly showed the effort to recover. "Don't mind me," she said through her tears ; "I shall pull myself together ; I shall be all right in a moment." He wondered whether he oughtn't to leave her ; and yet to leave her was scarcely courteous. She was quickly erect again, with her characteristic thought for others flowering out through her pain. "Only don't let Julia know—that's all I ask of you. One's little bothers are one's little bothers—they're all in the day's work. Just give me three minutes, and I shan't show a trace." She

straightened herself and even smiled, patting her eyes with her crumpled handkerchief, while Tony marvelled at her courage and good humour.

"Of one thing you must be sure, Rose," he expressively answered, "that whatever happens to you, now or at any time, you've friends here and a home here that are yours for weal and woe."

"Ah, don't say that," she cried; "I can scarcely bear it! Disappointments one can meet; but how in the world is one adequately to meet generosity? Of one thing you, on your side, must be sure: that no trouble in life shall ever make me a bore. It was because I was so awfully afraid to be one that I've been keeping myself in—and that has led, in this ridiculous way, to my making a fool of myself at the last. I knew a hitch was coming—I knew at least something was; but I hoped it would come and go without *this!*" She had stopped before a mirror, still dealing, like an actress in the wing, with her appearance, her make-up. She dabbed at her cheeks and pressed her companion to leave her to herself. "Don't pity me, don't mind me; and, above all, don't ask any questions."

"Ah," said Tony in friendly remonstrance, "your bravery makes it too hard to help you!"

"Don't try to help me—don't even want to. And don't tell any tales. Hush!" she went on in a different tone. "Here's Mrs. Beever!"

The lady of Eastmead was preceded by the butler, who, having formally announced her, announced luncheon as invidiously as if it had only been waiting for her. The servants at each house had ways of reminding her they were not the servants at the other.

"Luncheon's all very well," said Tony, "but who in the world's to eat it? Before *you* do," he continued, to Mrs. Beever, "there's something I must ask of you."

"And something I must ask too," Rose added, while the butler retired like a conscientious Minister retiring from untenable office. She addressed herself to their neighbour with a face void, to Tony's astonishment, of every vestige of disorder. "Didn't Mr. Vidal come back with you?"

Mrs. Beever looked incorruptible. "Indeed he did!" she sturdily replied. "Mr. Vidal is in the garden of this house."

"Then I'll call him to luncheon." And Rose floated away, leaving her companions confronted in a silence that ended—as Tony was lost in the wonder of her presence of mind—only when Mrs. Beever had assured herself that she was out of earshot.

"She has broken it off!" this lady then responsibly proclaimed.

Her colleague demurred. "She? How do you know?"

"I know because he has told me so."

"Already—in these few minutes?"

Mrs. Beever hung fire. "Of course I asked him first. I met him at the bridge—I saw he had had a shock."

"It's Rose who has had the shock!" Tony returned. "It's he who has thrown her over."

Mrs. Beever stared. "That's *her* story?"

Tony reflected. "Practically—yes."

Again his visitor hesitated, but only for an instant.

"Then one of them lies."

Tony laughed out at her lucidity. "It isn't Rose Armiger!"

"It isn't Dennis Vidal, my dear; I believe in him," said Mrs. Beever.

Her companion's amusement grew. "Your operations are rapid."

"Remarkably. I've asked him to come to me."

Tony raised his eyebrows. "To come to you?"

"Till he can get a train—to-morrow. He can't stay on here."

Tony looked at it. "I see what you mean."

"That's a blessing—you don't always! I like him—he's my sort. And something seems to tell me I'm his!"

"I won't gracefully insult you by saying you're every one's," Tony observed. Then, after an instant, "Is he very much cut up?" he inquired.

"He's utterly staggered. He doesn't understand."

Tony thought again. "No more do I. But you'll console him," he added.

"I'll feed him first," said his neighbour. "I'll take him back with me to luncheon."

"Isn't that scarcely civil?"

"Civil to you?" Mrs. Beever interposed. "That's exactly what he asked me. I told him I would arrange it with you."

"And you're 'arranging' it, I see. But how can you take him if Rose is bringing him in?"

Mrs. Beever was silent a while. "She isn't. She hasn't gone to him. That was for *me*."

Tony looked at her in wonder. "Your operations are rapid," he repeated. "But I found her under the unmistakable effect of a blow."

"I found her exactly as usual."

"Well, that also was for you," said Tony. "Her disappointment's a secret."

"Then I'm much obliged to you for mentioning it."

"I did so to defend her against your bad account of her. But the whole thing's obscure," the young man added with sudden weariness. "I give it up!"

"I don't—I shall straighten it out." Mrs. Beever spoke with high decision. "But I must see your wife first."

"Rather!—she's waiting all this while." He had already opened the door.

As she reached it she stopped again. "Shall I find the Doctor with her?"

"Yes, by her request."

"Then how is she?"

"Maddening!" Tony exclaimed; after which, as his visitor echoed the word, he went on: "I mean in

her dreadful obsession, to which poor Ramage has had to give way and which is the direct reason of her calling you."

Mrs. Beever's little eyes seemed to see more than he told her, to have indeed the vision of something formidable. "What dreadful obsession?"

"She'll tell you herself." He turned away to leave her to go, and she disappeared; but the next moment he heard her again on the threshold.

"Only a word to say that that child may turn up."

"What child?" He had already forgotten.

"Oh, if you don't remember——!" Mrs. Beever, with feminine in consequence, almost took it ill.

Tony recovered the agreeable image. "Oh, your niece? Certainly—I remember her hair."

"She's not my niece, and her hair's hideous. But if she does come, send her straight home!"

"Very good," said Tony. This time his visitor vanished.

XII

He moved a minute about the hall ; then he dropped upon a sofa with a sense of exhaustion and a sudden need of rest ; he stretched himself, closing his eyes, glad to be alone, glad above all to make sure that he could lie still. He wished to show himself he was not nervous ; he took up a position with the purpose not to budge till Mrs. Beever should come back. His house was in an odd condition, with luncheon pompously served and no one able to go to it. Poor Julia was in a predicament, poor Rose in another, and poor Mr. Vidal, fasting in the garden, in a greater one than either. Tony sighed as he thought of this dispersal, but he stiffened himself resolutely on his couch. He wouldn't go in alone, and he couldn't even enjoy Mrs. Beever. It next occurred to him that he could still less enjoy her little friend, the child he had promised to turn away ; on which he gave a sigh

that represented partly privation and partly resignation—partly also a depressed perception of the fact that he had never in all his own healthy life been less eager for a meal. Meanwhile, however, the attempt to stop pacing the floor was a success : he felt as if in closing his eyes he destroyed the vision that had scared him. He was cooler, he was easier, and he liked the smell of flowers in the dusk. What was droll, when he gave himself up to it, was the sharp sense of lassitude ; it had dropped on him out of the blue and it showed him how a sudden alarm—such as, after all, he had had—could drain a fellow in an hour of half his vitality. He wondered whether, if he might be undisturbed a little, the result of this surrender wouldn't be to make him delightfully lose consciousness.

He never knew afterwards whether it was in the midst of his hope or on the inner edge of a doze just achieved that he became aware of a footfall betraying an uncertain advance. He raised his lids to it and saw before him the pretty girl from the other house, whom, for a moment before he moved, he lay there looking at. He immediately recognised that what had roused him was the fact that, noise-

lessly and for a few seconds, her eyes had rested on his face. She uttered a blushing "Oh!" which deplored this effect of her propinquity and which brought Tony straight to his feet. "Ah, good morning! How d'ye do?" Everything came back to him but her name. "Excuse my attitude—I didn't hear you come in."

"When I saw you asleep I'm afraid I kept the footman from speaking." Jean Martle was much embarrassed, but it contributed in the happiest way to her animation. "I came in because he told me that Cousin Kate's here."

"Oh yes, she's here—she thought you might arrive. Do sit down," Tony added with his prompt instinct of what, in his own house, was due from a man of some confidence to a girl of none at all. It operated before he could check it, and Jean was as passive to it as if he had tossed her a command; but as soon as she was seated, to obey him, in a high-backed, wide-armed Venetian chair which made a gilded cage for her flutter, and he had again placed himself—not in the same position—on the sofa opposite, he recalled the request just preferred by Mrs. Beever. He was to send her straight home;

yes, it was to be invited instantly to retrace her steps that she sat there panting and pink.

Meanwhile she was very upright and very serious ; she seemed very anxious to explain. " I thought it better to come, since she wasn't there. I had gone off to walk home with the Marshes—I was gone rather long ; and when I came back she had left the house—the servants told me she must be here."

Tony could only meet with the note of hospitality so logical a plea. " Oh, it's all right—Mrs. Beever's with Mrs. Bream." It was apparently all wrong—he must tell her she couldn't stay ; but there was a prior complication in his memory of having invited her to luncheon. " I wrote to your cousin—I hoped you'd come. Unfortunately she's not staying herself."

" Ah, then, *I* mustn't ! " Jean spoke with lucidity, but without quitting her chair.

Tony hesitated. " She'll be a little while yet—my wife has something to say to her."

The girl had fixed her eyes on the floor ; she might have been reading there the fact that for the first time in her life she was regularly calling on a

gentleman. Since this was the singular case she must at least call properly. Her manner revealed an earnest effort to that end, an effort visible even in the fear of a liberty if she should refer too familiarly to Mrs. Bream. She cast about her with intensity for something that would show sympathy without freedom, and, as a result, presently produced : " I came an hour ago, and I saw Miss Armiger. She told me she would bring down the baby."

" But she didn't ? "

" No, Cousin Kate thought it wouldn't do."

Tony was happily struck. " It will do—it shall do. Should you like to see her ? "

" I thought I should like it very much. It's very kind of you."

Tony jumped up. " I'll show her to you myself." He went over to ring a bell ; then, as he came back, he added : " I delight in showing her. I think she's the wonder of the world."

" That's what babies always seem to me," said Jean. " It's so absorbing to watch them."

These remarks were exchanged with great gravity, with stiffish pauses, while Tony hung about till his ring should be answered.

"Absorbing?" he repeated. "Isn't it, preposterously? Wait till you've watched Effie!"

His visitor preserved for a while a silence which might have indicated that, with this injunction, her waiting had begun; but at last she said with the same simplicity: "I've a sort of original reason for my interest in her."

"Do you mean the illness of her poor mother?" He saw that she meant nothing so patronising, though her countenance fell with the reminder of this misfortune: she heard with awe that the unconscious child was menaced. "That's a very good reason," he declared, to relieve her. "But so much the better if you've got another too. I hope you'll never want for one to be kind to her."

She looked more assured. "I'm just the person always to be."

"Just the person——?" Tony felt that he must draw her out. She was now arrested, however, by the arrival of the footman, to whom he immediately turned. "Please ask Gorham to be as good as to bring down the child."

"Perhaps Gorham will think it won't do," Jean suggested as the servant went off.

"Oh, she's as proud of her as I am! But if she doesn't approve I'll take you upstairs. That'll be because, as you say you're just the person. I haven't the least doubt of it—but you were going to tell me why."

Jean treated it as if it were almost a secret. "Because she was born on *my* day."

"Your birthday?"

"My birthday—the twenty-fourth."

"Oh, I see; that's charming—that's delightful!" The circumstance had not quite all the subtlety she had beguiled him into looking for, but her amusing belief in it, which halved the date like a succulent pear, mingled oddly, to make him quickly feel that it had enough, with his growing sense that Mrs. Beever's judgment of her hair was a libel. "It's a most extraordinary coincidence—it makes a most interesting tie. Do, therefore, I beg you, whenever you keep you anniversary, keep also a little hers."

"That's just what I was thinking," said Jean. Then she added, still shy, yet suddenly almost radiant: "I shall always send her something!"

"She shall do the same to you!" This idea had a charm even for Tony, who determined on the

spot, quite sincerely, that he would, for the first years at least, make it his own charge. "You're her very first friend," he smiled.

"Am I?" Jean thought it wonderful news. "Before she has even seen me!"

"Oh, those *are* the first. You're 'handed down,'" said Tony, humouring her.

She evidently deprecated, however, any abatement of her rarity. "Why, I haven't seen her mother, either."

"No, you haven't seen her mother. But you shall. And you have seen her father."

"Yes, I have seen her father." Looking at him as if to make sure of it, Jean gave this assertion the assent of a gaze so unrestricted that, feeling herself after an instant caught, as it were, in it, she turned abruptly away.

It came back to Tony at the same moment with a sort of coarseness that he was to have sent her home; yet now, somehow, as if half through the familiarity it had taken but these minutes to establish, and half through a perception of her extreme juvenility, his reluctance to tell her so had dropped. "Do you know I'm under a sort of

dreadful vow to Mrs. Beever?" Then as she faced him again, wondering: "She told me that if you should turn up I was to pack you off."

Jean stared with a fresh alarm. "Ah, I shouldn't have stayed!"

"You didn't know it, and I couldn't show you the door."

"Then I must go now."

"Not a bit. I wouldn't have mentioned it—to consent to that. I mention it for just the other reason—to keep you here as long as possible. I'll make it right with Cousin Kate," Tony continued. "I'm not afraid of her!" he laughed. "You produce an effect on me for which I'm particularly grateful." She was acutely sensitive; for a few seconds she looked as if she thought he might be amusing himself at her expense. "I mean you soothe me—at a moment when I really want it," he said with a gentleness from which it gave him pleasure to see in her face an immediate impression. "I'm worried, I'm depressed, I've been threshing about in my anxiety. You keep me cool—you're just the right thing." He nodded at her in clear kindness. "Stay with me—stay with me!"

Jean had not taken the flight of expressing a concern for his domestic situation, but in the pity that flooded her eyes at this appeal there was an instant surrender to nature. It was the sweetness of her youth that had calmed him, but in the response his words had evoked she already, on the spot, looked older. "Ah, if I *could* help you!" she timidly murmured.

"Sit down again ; sit down !" He turned away. "Here's the wonder of the world !" he exclaimed the next instant, seeing Gorham appear with her charge. His interest in the apparition almost simultaneously dropped, for Mrs. Beever was at the opposite door. She had come back, and Ramage was with her : they stopped short together, and he did the same on catching the direction, as he supposed, of his sharp neighbour's eyes. She had an air of singular intensity ; it was peculiarly embodied in a look which, as she drew herself up, she shot straight past him and under the reprobation of which he glanced round to see Jean Martle turn pale. What he saw, however, was not Jean Martle at all, but that very different person Rose Armiger, who, by an odd chance and with Dennis Vidal at

her side, presented herself at this very juncture at the door of the vestibule. It was at Rose Mrs. Beever stared—stared with a significance doubtless produced by this young lady's falsification of her denial that Mr. Vidal had been actively pursued. She took no notice of Jean, who, while the rest of them stood about, testified to her prompt compliance with any word of Tony's by being the only member of the company in a chair. The sight of Mrs. Beever's face appeared to have deprived her of the force to rise. Tony observed these things in a flash, and also how far the gaze of the Gorgon was from petrifying Rose Armiger, who, with a bright recovery of zeal by which he himself was wonderstruck, launched without delay a conscientious reminder of luncheon. It was on the table—it was spoiling—it was spoilt! Tony felt that he must gallantly support her. "Let us at last go in then," he said to Mrs. Beever. "Let us go in then," he repeated to Jean and to Dennis Vidal. "Doctor, you'll come too?"

He broke Jean's spell at a touch; she was on her feet; but the Doctor raised, as if for general application, a deterrent, authoritative hand. "If you please,

Bream—no banquet.” He looked at Jean, at Rose, at Vidal, at Gorham. “I take the house in hand. We immediately subside.”

Tony sprang to him. “Julia’s worse?”

“No—she’s the same.”

“Then I may go to her?”

“Absolutely not.” Doctor Ramage grasped his arm, linked his own in it and held him. “If you’re not a good boy I lock you up in your room. We immediately subside,” he said again, addressing the others; “we go our respective ways and we keep very still. The fact is I require a hushed house. But before the hush descends Mrs. Beever has something to say to you.”

She was on the other side of Tony, who felt, between them there, like their prisoner. She looked at her little audience, which consisted of Jean and Rose, of Mr. Vidal and the matronly Gorham. Gorham carried in her ample arms a large white sacrifice, a muslin-muffled offering which seemed to lead up to a ceremony. “I have something to say to you because Doctor Ramage allows it, and because we are both under pledges to Mrs. Bream. It’s a very peculiar announcement for

me to have on my hands, but I've just passed her my promise, in the very strictest manner, to make it, before leaving the house, to every one it may concern, and to repeat it in certain other quarters." She paused again, and Tony, from his closeness to her, could feel the tremor of her solid presence. She disliked the awkwardness and the coercion, and he was sorry for her, because by this time he well knew what was coming. He had guessed his wife's extraordinary precaution, which would have been almost grotesque if it hadn't been so infinitely touching. It seemed to him that he gave the measure of his indulgence for it in overlooking the wound to his delicacy conveyed in the publicity she imposed. He could condone this in a tender sigh, because it meant that in consequence of it she'd now pull round. "She wishes it as generally known as possible," Mrs. Beever brought out, "that Mr. Bream, to gratify her at a crisis which I trust she exaggerates, has assured her on his sacred honour that in the event of her death he will not again marry."

"In the lifetime of her daughter, that is," Doctor Ramage hastened to add.

"In the lifetime of her daughter," Mrs. Beever as clearly echoed.

"In the lifetime of her daughter!" Tony himself took up with an extravagance intended to offer the relief of a humorous treatment, if need be, to the bewildered young people whose embarrassed stare was a prompt criticism of Julia's discretion. It might have been in the spirit of a protest still more vehement that, at this instant, a small shrill pipe rose from the animated parcel with which Gorham, participating in the general awkwardness, had possibly taken a liberty. The comical little sound created a happy diversion; Tony sprang straight to the child. "So it *is*, my own," he cried, "a scandal to be talking of 'lifetimes!'" He caught her from the affrighted nurse—he put his face down to hers with passion. Her wail ceased and he held her close to him; for a minute, in silence, as if something deep went out from him, he laid his cheek to her little cheek, burying his head under her veil. When he gave her up again, turning round, the hall was empty of every one save the Doctor, who signalled peremptorily to Gorham to withdraw. Tony remained there meeting his eyes,

in which, after an instant, the young man saw something that led him to exclaim: "How dreadfully ill she must be, Ramage, to have conceived a stroke in such taste!"

His companion drew him down to the sofa, patting, soothing, supporting him. "You must bear it my dear boy—you must bear everything." Doctor Ramage faltered. "Your wife's exceedingly ill."

END OF BOOK FIRST

BOOK SECOND

XIII

It continued to be for the lady of Eastmead, as the years went on, a sustaining reflection that if in the matter of upholstery she yielded somewhat stiffly to the other house, so the other house was put out of all countenance by the mere breath of her garden. Tony could beat her indoors at every point, but when she took her stand on her lawn she could defy not only Bounds but Wilverley. Her stand, and still more her seat, in the summer days, was frequent there, as we easily gather from the fortified position in which we next encounter her. From May to October she was out, as she said, at grass, drawing from it most of the time a comfortable sense that on such ground as this her young friend's love of newness broke down. He might make his dinner-service as new as he liked ; she triumphed precisely in the fact that her trees and her shrubs were old. He could hang nothing on his walls like her creepers and

clusters ; there was no velvet in his carpets like the velvet of her turf. She had everything, or almost everything—she had space and time and the river. No one at Wilverley had the river as she had it ; people might say of course there was little of it to have, but of whatever there was she was in intimate possession. It skirted her grounds and improved her property and amused her guests ; she always held that her free access made up for being, as people said, on the wrong side of it. If she had not been on the wrong side she would not have had the little stone foot-bridge which was her special pride and the very making of her picture, and which she had heard compared—she had an off-hand way of bringing it in—to a similar feature, at Cambridge, of one of the celebrated “backs.” The other side was the side of the other house, the side for the view—the view as to which she entertained the merely qualified respect excited in us, after the first creative flush, by mysteries of our own making. Mrs. Beever herself formed the view and the other house was welcome to it, especially to those parts of it enjoyed through the rare gaps in an interposing leafy lane. Tony had a gate which he called his river-gate, but

you didn't so much as suspect the stream till you got well out of it. He had on his further quarter a closer contact with the town ; but this was just what on both quarters she had with the country. Her approach to the town was by the "long way" and the big bridge, and by going on, as she liked to do, past the Doctor's square red house. She hated stopping there, hated it as much as she liked his stopping at Eastmead : in the former case she seemed to consult him and in the latter to advise, which was the exercise of her wisdom that she decidedly preferred. Such degrees and dimensions, I hasten to add, had to do altogether with short relations and small things ; but it was just the good lady's reduced scale that held her little world together. So true is it that from strong compression the elements of drama spring and that there are conditions in which they seem to invite not so much the opera-glass as the microscope.

Never, perhaps, at any rate, had Mrs. Beever been more conscious of her advantages, or at least more surrounded with her conveniences, than on a beautiful afternoon of June on which we are again concerned with her. These blessings were partly

embodied in the paraphernalia of tea, which had cropped up, with promptness and profusion, in a sheltered corner of the lawn and in the midst of which, waiting for custom, she might have been in charge of a refreshment-stall at a fair. Everything at the other house struck her as later and later, and she only regretted that, as the protest of her own tradition, she couldn't move in the opposite direction without also moving from the hour. She waited for it now, at any rate, in the presence of a large red rug and a large white tablecloth, as well as of sundry basket-chairs and of a hammock that swayed in the soft west wind; and she had meanwhile been occupied with a collection of parcels and paste-board boxes that were heaped together on a bench. Of one of these parcels, enveloped in several layers of tissue-paper, she had just possessed herself, and, seated near her tea-table, was on the point of uncovering it. She became aware, at this instant, of being approached from behind; on which, looking over her shoulder and seeing Doctor Ramage, she straightway stayed her hands. These friends, in a long acquaintance, had dropped by the way so many preliminaries that absence, in their intercourse, was

a mere parenthesis and conversation in general scarce began with a capital. But on this occasion the Doctor was floated to a seat not, as usual, on the bosom of the immediately previous.

"Guess whom I've just overtaken on your doorstep. The young man you befriended four years ago—Mr. Vidal, Miss Armiger's flame!"

Mrs. Beever fell back in her surprise; it was rare for Mrs. Beever to fall back. "He has turned up again?" Her eyes had already asked more than her friend could tell. "For what in the world——?"

"For the pleasure of seeing you. He has evidently retained a very grateful sense of what you did for him."

"I did nothing, my dear man—I had to let it alone."

"Tony's condition—of course I remember—again required you. But you gave him a shelter," said the Doctor, "that wretched day and that night, and he felt (it was evidently much to him) that, in his rupture with his young woman, you had the right instinct of the matter and were somehow on his side."

"I put him up for a few hours—I saved him, in

time, the embarrassment of finding himself in a house of death. But he took himself off the next morning early—bidding me good-bye only in a quiet little note."

"A quiet little note which I remember you afterwards showed me and which was a model of discretion and good taste. It seems to me," the Doctor went on, "that he doesn't violate those virtues in considering that you've given him the right to reappear."

"At the very time, and the only time, in so long a period that his young woman, as you call her, happens also to be again in the field!"

"That's a coincidence," the Doctor replied, "far too singular for Mr. Vidal to have had any forecast of it."

"You didn't then tell him?"

"I told him nothing save that you were probably just where I find you, and that, as Manning is busy with her tea-things, I would come straight out for him and announce that he's there."

Mrs. Beever's sense of complications evidently grew as she thought. "By 'there' do you mean on the doorstep?"

"Far from it. In the safest place in the world—at least when you're not in it."

"In my own room?" Mrs. Beever asked.

"In that austere monument to Domestic Method which you're sometimes pleased to call your boudoir. I took upon myself to show him into it and to close the door on him there. I reflected that you'd perhaps like to see him before any one else."

Mrs. Beever looked at her visitor with appreciation. "You dear, sharp thing!"

"Unless, indeed," the Doctor added, "they have, in so many years, already met."

"She told me only yesterday they haven't."

"I see. However, as I believe you consider that she never speaks the truth, that doesn't particularly count."

"I hold, on the contrary, that a lie counts double," Mrs. Beever replied with decision.

Doctor Ramage laughed. "Then why have you never in your life told one? I haven't even yet quite made out," he pursued, "why—especially with Miss Jean here—you asked Miss Armiger down."

"I asked her for Tony."

"Because he suggested it? Yes, I know that."

"I mean it," said Mrs. Beever, "in a sense I think you don't know." She looked at him a moment; but either her profundity or his caution were too great, and he waited for her to commit herself further. That was a thing she could always do rapidly without doing it recklessly. "I asked her exactly on account of Jean."

The Doctor meditated, but this seemed to deepen her depth. "I give it up. You've mostly struck me as so afraid of every other girl Paul looks at."

Mrs. Beever's face was grave. "Yes, I've always been; but I'm not so afraid of them as of those at whom Tony looks."

Her interlocutor started. "He's looking at Jean?"

Mrs. Beever was silent a little. "Not for the first time!"

Her visitor also hesitated. "And do you think, Miss Armiger——?"

Mrs. Beever took him up. "Miss Armiger's better for him—since he must have somebody!"

"You consider she'd marry him?"

"She's insanely in love with him."

The Doctor tilted up his chin; he uttered an

expressive "Euh!—She is indeed, poor thing!" he said. "Since you frankly mention it, I as frankly agree with you, that I've never seen anything like it. And there's monstrous little I've not seen. But if Tony isn't crazy too——?"

"It's a kind of craze that's catching. He must think of that sort of thing."

"I don't know what you mean by 'thinking!' Do you imply that the dear man, on what we know——?" The Doctor couldn't phrase it.

His friend had greater courage. "Would break his vow and marry again?" She turned it over, but at last she brought out: "Never in the world."

"Then how does the chance of his thinking of Rose help her?"

"I don't say it helps her. I simply say it helps poor me."

Doctor Ramage was still mystified. "But if they can't marry——?"

"I don't care whether they marry or not!"

She faced him with the bravery of this, and he broke into a happy laugh. "I don't know whether most to admire your imagination or your morality."

"I protect *my* girl," she serenely declared.

Doctor Ramage made his choice. "Oh, your morality!"

"In doing so," she went on, "I also protect my boy. That's the highest morality I know. I'll see Mr. Vidal out here," she added.

"So as to get rid of him easier?"

"My getting rid of him will depend on what he wants. He must take, after all," Mrs. Beaver continued, "his chance of meeting any embarrassment. If he plumps in without feeling his way——"

"It's his own affair—I see," the Doctor said. What he saw was that his friend's diplomacy had suffered a slight disturbance. Mr. Vidal was a new element in her reckoning; for if, of old, she had liked and pitied him, he had since dropped out of her problem. Her companion, who timed his pleasures to the minute, indulged in one of his frequent glances at his watch. "I'll put it then to the young man—more gracefully than you do—that you'll receive him in this place."

"I shall be much obliged to you."

"But before I go," Doctor Ramage inquired, "where are all our friends?"

"I haven't the least idea. The only ones I count on are Effie and Jean."

The Doctor made a motion of remembrance. "To be sure—it's their birthday: that fellow put it out of my head. The child's to come over to you to tea, and just what I stopped for——"

"Was to see if I had got your doll?" Mrs. Beever interrupted him by holding up the muffled parcel in her lap. She pulled away the papers. "Allow me to introduce the young lady."

The young lady was sumptuous and ample; he took her in his hands with reverence. "She's splendid—she's positively human! I feel like a Turkish pasha investing in a beautiful Circassian. I feel too," the Doctor went on, "how right I was to depend, in the absence of Mrs. Ramage, on your infallible taste." Then restoring the effigy: "Kindly mention how much I owe you."

"Pay at the shop," said Mrs. Beever. "They 'trusted' me."

"With the same sense of security that I had!" The Doctor got up. "Please then present the object and accompany it with my love and a kiss."

"You can't come back to give them yourself?"

"What do I ever give 'myself,' dear lady, but medicine?"

"Very good," said Mrs. Beever; "the presentation shall be formal. But I ought to warn you that your beautiful Circassian will have been no less than the fourth." She glanced at the parcels on the bench. "I mean the fourth doll the child's to receive to-day."

The Doctor followed the direction of her eyes. "It's a regular slave-market—a perfect harem!"

"We've each of us given her one. Each, that is, except Rose."

"And what has Rose given her?"

"Nothing at all."

The Doctor thought a moment. "Doesn't she like her?"

"She seems to wish it to be marked that she has nothing to do with her."

Again Doctor Ramage reflected. "I see—that's very clever."

Mrs. Beever, from her chair, looked up at him. "What do you mean by 'clever'?"

"I'll tell you some other time." He still stood before the bench. "There are no gifts for poor Jean?"

"Oh, Jean has had most of hers."

"But nothing from *me*." The Doctor had but just thought of her; he turned sadly away. "I'm quite ashamed!"

"You needn't be," said Mrs. Beever. "She has also had nothing from Tony."

He seemed struck. "Indeed? On Miss Armiger's system?" His friend remained silent, and he went on: "That of wishing it to be marked that he has nothing to do with her?"

Mrs. Beever, for a minute, continued not to reply; but at last she exclaimed: "He doesn't calculate!"

"That's bad—for a banker!" Doctor Ramage laughed. "What then has she had from Paul?"

"Nothing either—as yet. That's to come this evening."


"And what's it to be?"

Mrs. Beever hesitated. "I haven't an idea."

"Ah, you *can* fib!" joked her visitor, taking leave.

XIV

HE crossed on his way to the house a tall parlour-maid who had just quitted it with a tray which a moment later she deposited on the table near her mistress. Tony Bream was accustomed to say that since Frederick the Great's grenadiers there had never been anything like the queen-mother's parlourmaids, who indeed on field-days might, in stature, uniform and precision of exercise, have affronted comparison with that formidable phalanx. They were at once more athletic and more reserved than Tony liked to see their sex, and he was always sure that the extreme length of their frocks was determined by that of their feet. The young woman, at any rate, who now presented herself, a young woman with a large nose and a straight back, stiff capstreamers, stiffer petticoats and stiffest manners, was plainly the corporal of her squad. There was a murmur and a twitter all around her; but she



rustled about the tea-table to a tune that quenched the voice of summer. It left undisturbed, however, for awhile, Mrs. Beever's meditations; that lady was thoughtfully occupied in wrapping up Doctor Ramage's doll. "Do you know, Manning, what has become of Miss Armiger?" she at last inquired.

"She went, ma'am, near an hour ago, to the pastrycook's."

"To the pastrycook's?"

"She had heard you wonder, ma'am, she told me, that the young ladies' birthday-cake hadn't yet arrived."

"And she thought she'd see about it? Uncommonly good of her!" Mrs. Beever exclaimed.

"Yes, ma'am, uncommonly good."

"Has it arrived, then, now?"

"Not yet, ma'am."

"And Miss Armiger hasn't returned?"

"I think not, ma'am."

Mrs. Beever considered again. "Perhaps she's waiting to bring it."

Manning indulged in a proportionate pause. "Perhaps, ma'am—in a fly. And when it comes, ma'am, shall I fetch it out?"

"In a fly too? I'm afraid," said Mrs. Beever, "that with such an incubation it will really require one." After a moment she added: "I'll go in and look at it first." And then, as her attendant was about to rustle away, she further detained her. "Mr. Bream hasn't been over?"

"Not yet, ma'am."

Mrs. Beever consulted her watch. "Then he's still at the Bank."

"He must be indeed, ma'am."

Tony's colleague appeared for a little to ponder this prompt concurrence; after which she said: "You haven't seen Miss Jean?"


Manning bethought herself. "I believe, ma'am, Miss Jean is dressing."

"Oh, in honour——" But Mrs. Beever's idea dropped before she finished her sentence.

Manning ventured to take it up. "In honour of her birthday, ma'am."

"I see—of course. And do you happen to have heard if that's what also detains Miss Effie—that she's dressing in honour of hers?"

Manning hesitated. "I heard, ma'am, this morning that Miss Effie had a slight cold."



Her mistress looked surprised. "But not such as to keep her at home?"

"They were taking extra care of her, ma'am—so that she might be all right for coming."

Mrs. Beever was not pleased. "Extra care? Then why didn't they send for the Doctor?"

Again Manning hesitated. "They sent for Miss Jean, ma'am."

"To come and look after her?"

"They often do, ma'am, you know. This morning I took in the message."

"And Miss Jean obeyed it?"

"She was there an hour, ma'am."

Mrs. Beever administered a more than approving pat to the final envelope of her doll. "She said nothing about it."

Again Manning concurred. "Nothing, ma'am." The word sounded six feet high, like the figure she presented. She waited a moment and then, as if to close with as sharp a snap the last open door to the desirable, "Mr. Paul, ma'am," she observed, "if you were wanting to know, is out in his boat on the river."

Mrs. Beever pitched her parcel back to the bench. "Mr. Paul is never anywhere else!"

"Never, ma'am," said Manning inexorably. She turned the next instant to challenge the stranger who had come down from the house. "A gentleman, ma'am," she announced; and, retiring while Mrs. Beever rose to meet the visitor, drew, with the noise of a lawn-mower, a starched tail along the grass.

Dennis Vidal, with his hat off, showed his hostess a head over which not a year seemed to have passed. He had still his young, sharp, meagre look, and it came to her that the other time as well he had been dressed in double-breasted blue of a cut that made him sailorly. It was only on a longer view that she saw his special signs to be each a trifle intensified. He was browner, leaner, harder, finer; he even struck her as more wanting in height. These facts, however, didn't prevent another fact from striking her still more: what was most distinct in his face was that he was really glad to take her by the hand. That had an instant effect on her: she could glow with pleasure, modest matron as she was, at such an intimation of her having, so many years before, in a few hours, made on a clever young man she

liked an impression that could thus abide with him. In the quick light of it she liked him afresh ; it was as if their friendship put down on the spot a firm foot that was the result of a single stride across the chasm of time. In this indeed, to her clear sense, there was even something more to pity him for : it was such a dreary little picture of his interval, such an implication of what it had lacked, that there had been so much room in it for an ugly old woman at Wilverley. She motioned him to sit down with her, but she immediately remarked that before she asked him a question she had an important fact to make known. She had delayed too long, while he waited there, to let him understand that Rose Armiger was at Eastmead. She instantly saw at this that he had come in complete ignorance. The range of alarm in his face was narrow, but he coloured, looking grave ; and after a brief debate with himself he inquired as to Miss Armiger's actual whereabouts.

"She has gone out, but she may reappear at any moment," said Mrs. Beever.

"And if she does, will she come out here ?"

"I've an impression she'll change her dress first. That may take her a little time."

"Then I'm free to sit with you ten minutes?"

"As long as you like, dear Mr. Vidal. It's for you to choose whether you'll avoid her."

"I dislike dodging—I dislike hiding," Dennis returned; "but I daresay that if I had known where she was I wouldn't have come."

"I feel hatefully rude—but you took a leap in the dark. The absurd part of it," Mrs. Beever went on, "is that you've stumbled on her very first visit to me."

The young man showed a surprise which gave her the measure of his need of illumination. "For these four years?"

"For these four years. It's the only time she has been at Eastmead."

Dennis hesitated. "And how often has she been at the other house?"

Mrs. Beever smiled. "Not even once." Then as her smile broadened to a small, dry laugh, "I can quite say *that* for her!" she declared.

Dennis looked at her hard. "To your certain knowledge?"

"To my certain and absolute knowledge." This mutual candour continued, and presently she said: "But you—where do you come from?"

"From far away—I've been out of England. After my visit here I went back to my post."

"And now you've returned with your fortune?"

He gave her a smile from which the friendliness took something of the bitter quality. "Call it my *misfortune*!" There was nothing in this to deprive Mrs. Beever of the pleasant play of a professional sense that he had probably gathered such an independence as would have made him welcome at the Bank. On the other hand she caught the note of a tired grimness in the way he added: "I've come back with that. It sticks to me!"

For a minute she spared him. "You want her as much as ever?"

His eyes confessed to a full and indeed to a sore acceptance of that expression of the degree. "I want her as much as ever. It's my constitutional obstinacy!"

"Which her treatment of you has done nothing to break down?"

"To break down? It has done everything in life to build it up."

"In spite of the particular circumstance——?"
At this point even Mrs. Beever's directness failed.

That of her visitor, however, was equal to the occasion. "The particular circumstance of her chucking me because of the sudden glimpse given her, by Mrs. Bream's danger, of the possibility of a far better match?" He gave a laugh drier than her own had just been, the ring of an irony from which long, hard thought had pressed all the savour. "That 'particular circumstance,' dear madam, is every bit that's the matter with me!"

"You regard it with extraordinary coolness, but I presumed to allude to it——"

"Because," Dennis broke in with lucidity, "I myself made no bones of doing so on the only other occasion on which we've met?"

"The fact that we both equally *saw*, that we both equally judged," said Mrs. Beever, "was on that occasion really the only thing that had time to pass between us. It's a tie, but it's a slender one, and I'm all the more flattered that it should have had any force to make you care to see me again."

"It never ceased to be my purpose to see you, if you would permit it, on the first opportunity. My opportunity," the young man continued, "has been precipitated by an accident. I returned to England only last week, and was obliged two days ago to come on business to Southampton. There I found I should have to go, on the same matter, to Marrington. It then appeared that to get to Marrington I must change at Plumbury——"

"And Plumbury," said Mrs. Beever, "reminded you that you changed there, that it was from there you drove, on that horrible Sunday."

"It brought my opportunity home to me. Without wiring you or writing you, without sounding the ground or doing anything I ought to have done, I simply embraced it. I reached this place an hour ago and went to the inn."

She looked at him wofully. "Poor dear young man!"

He turned it off. "I do very well. Remember the places I've come from."

"I don't care in the least where you've come from! If Rose weren't here I could put you up so beautifully."

"Well, now that I know it," said Dennis after a moment, "I think I'm glad she's here. It's a fact the more to reckon with."

"You mean to see her then?"

He sat with his eyes fixed, weighing it well. "You must tell me two or three things first. Then I'll choose—I'll decide."

She waited for him to mention his requirements, turning to her teapot, which had been drawing, so that she could meanwhile hand him a cup. But for some minutes, taking it and stirring it, he only gazed and mused, as if his curiosities were so numerous that he scarcely knew which to pick out. Mrs. Beever at last, with a woman's sense for this, met him exactly at the right point. "I must tell you frankly that if four years ago she was a girl most people admired——"

He caught straight on. "She's still more wonderful now?"

Mrs. Beever distinguished. "I don't know about 'wonderful,' but she wears really well. She carries the years almost as you do, and her head better than any young woman I've ever seen. Life is somehow becoming to her. Every one's immensely

struck with her. She only needs to get what she wants. She has in short a charm that I recognise."

Her visitor stared at her words as if they had been a framed picture; the reflected colour of it made a light in his face. "And you speak as one who, I remember, doesn't like her."

The lady of Eastmead faltered, but there was help in her characteristic courage. "No—I don't like her."

"I see," Dennis considered. "May I ask then why you invited her?"

"For the most definite reason in the world. Mr. Bream asked me to."

Dennis gave his hard smile. "Do you do everything Mr. Bream asks?"

"He asks so little!"

"Yes," Dennis allowed—"if that's a specimen! Does he like her still?" he inquired.

"Just as much as ever."

The young man was silent a few seconds. "Do you mean he's in love with her?"

"He never was—in any degree."

Dennis looked doubtful. "Are you very sure?"

"Well," said his hostess, "I'm sure of the present. That's quite enough. He's not in love with her now—I have the proof."

"The proof?"

Mrs. Beever waited a moment. "His request in itself. If he were in love with her he never would have made it."

There was a momentary appearance on her companion's part of thinking this rather too fine; but he presently said: "You mean because he's completely held by his death-bed vow to his wife?"

"Completely held."

"There's no likelihood of his breaking it?"

"Not the slightest."

Dennis Vidal exhaled a low, long breath which evidently represented a certain sort of relief. "You're very positive; but I've a great respect for your judgment." He thought an instant, then he pursued abruptly: "Why did he wish her invited?"

"For reasons that, as he expressed them to me, struck me as natural enough. For the sake of old acquaintance—for the sake of his wife's memory."

"He doesn't consider, then, that Mrs. Bream's

obsession, as you term it, had been in any degree an apprehension of Rose ? ”

“ Why should he ? ” Mrs. Beever asked. “ Rose, for poor Julia, was on the point of becoming your wife.”

“ Ah ! for all that was to prevent ! ” Dennis ruefully exclaimed.

“ It was to prevent little enough, but Julia never knew how little. Tony asked me a month ago if I thought he might without awkwardness propose to Miss Armiger a visit to the other house. I said ‘ No, silly boy ! ’ and he dropped the question ; but a week later he came back to it. He confided to me that he was ashamed for so long to have done so little for her ; and she had behaved in a difficult situation with such discretion and delicacy that to have ‘ shunted ’ her, as he said, so completely was a kind of outrage to Julia’s affection for her and a slur upon hers for his wife. I said to him that if it would help him a bit I would address her a suggestion that she should honour me with her company. He jumped at that, and I wrote. *She* jumped, and here she is.”

Poor Dennis, at this, gave a spring, as if the young

lady had come into sight. Mrs. Beever reassured him, but he was on his feet and he stood before her. "This then is their first meeting?"

"Dear, no! they've met in London. He often goes up."

"How often?"

"Oh, irregularly. Sometimes twice a month."

"And he sees her every time?"

Mrs. Beever considered. "Every time? I should think—hardly."

"Then every other?"

"I haven't the least idea."

Dennis looked round the garden. "You say you're convinced that, in the face of his promise, he has no particular interest in her. You mean, however, of course, but to the extent of marriage."

"I mean," said Mrs. Beever, "to the extent of anything at all." She also rose; she brought out her whole story. "He's in love with another person."

"Ah," Dennis murmured, "that's none of my business!" He nevertheless closed his eyes an instant with the cool balm of it. "But it makes a lot of difference."

She laid a kind hand on his arm. "Such a lot, I

hope, then, that you'll join our little party?" He looked about him again, irresolute, and his eyes fell on the packages gathered hard by, of which the nature was betrayed by a glimpse of flaxen curls and waxen legs. She immediately enlightened him. "Preparations for a birthday visit from the little girl at the other house. She's coming over to receive them."

Again he dropped upon a seat; she stood there and he looked up at her. "At last we've got to business! It's *she* I've come to ask about."

"And what do you wish to ask?"

"How she goes on—I mean in health."

"Not very well, I believe, just to-day!" Mrs. Beever laughed.

"Just to-day?"

"She's reported to have a slight cold. But don't be alarmed. In general she's splendid."

He hesitated. "Then you call it a good little life?"

"I call it a beautiful one!"

"I mean she won't pop off?"

"I can't guarantee that," said Mrs. Beever.

"But till she does——"

"Till she does?" he asked, as she paused.

She paused a moment longer. "Well, it's a comfort to see her. You'll do that for yourself."

"I shall do that for myself," Dennis repeated. After a moment he went on: "To be utterly frank, it was to do it I came."

"And not to see me? Thank you! But I quite understand," said Mrs. Beever; "you looked to me to introduce you. Sit still where you are, and I will."

"There's one thing more I must ask you. You see; you know; you can tell me." He complied but a minute with her injunction; again, nervously, he was on his feet. "Is Miss Armiger in love with Mr. Bream?"

His hostess turned away. "That's the one question I can't answer." Then she faced him again. "You must find out for yourself."

He stood looking at her. "How shall I find out?"

"By watching her."

"Oh, I didn't come to do *that*!" Dennis, on his side, turned away; he was visibly dissatisfied. But he checked himself; before him rose a young man in

boating flannels, who appeared to have come up from the river, who had advanced noiselessly across the lawn and whom Mrs. Beever introduced without ceremony as her "boy." Her boy blinked at Dennis, to whose identity he received no clue ; and her visitor decided on a course. "May I think over what you've said to me and come back ?"

"I shall be very happy to see you again. But, in this poor place, what will you do ?"

- Dennis glanced at the river ; then he appealed to the young man. "Will you lend me your boat ?"

"It's mine," said Mrs. Beever, with decision. "You're welcome to it."

"I'll take a little turn." Raising his hat, Dennis went rapidly down to the stream.

Paul Beever looked after him. "Hadn't I better show him—— ?" he asked of his mother.

"You had better sit right down there." She pointed with sharpness to the chair Dennis had quitted, and her son submissively took possession of it.

XV

PAUL BEEVER was tall and fat, and his eyes, like his mother's, were very small ; but more even than to his mother nature had offered him a compensation for this defect in the extension of the rest of the face. He had large, bare, beardless cheeks and a wide, clean, candid mouth, which the length of the smooth upper lip caused to look as exposed as a bald head. He had a deep fold of flesh round his uncovered young neck, and his white flannels showed his legs to be all the way down of the same thickness. He promised to become massive early in life and even to attain a remarkable girth. His great tastes were for cigarettes and silence ; but he was, in spite of his proportions, neither gross nor lazy. If he was indifferent to his figure he was equally so to his food, and he played cricket with his young townsmen and danced hard with their wives and sisters. Wilverley liked him and Tony Bream thought well

of him : it was only his mother who had not yet made up her mind. He had done a good deal at Oxford in not doing any harm, and he had subsequently rolled round the globe in the very groove with which she had belted it. But it was exactly in satisfying that he a little disappointed her : she had provided so against dangers that she found it a trifle dull to be so completely safe. It had become with her a question not of how clever he was, but of how stupid. Tony had expressed the view that he was distinctly deep, but that might only have been, in Tony's florid way, to show that he himself was so. She would not have found it convenient to have to give the boy an account of Mr. Vidal ; but now that, detached from her purposes and respectful of her privacies, he sat there without making an inquiry, she was disconcerted enough slightly to miss the opportunity to snub him. On this occasion, however, she could steady herself with the possibility that her hour would still come. He began to eat a bun—his row justified that ; and meanwhile she helped him to his tea. As she handed him the cup she challenged him with some sharpness. " Pray, when are you going to give it ? "

He slowly masticated while he looked at her.
"When do you think I had better?"

"Before dinner—distinctly. One doesn't know what may happen."

"Do you think anything at all will?" he placidly asked.

His mother waited before answering. "Nothing, certainly, unless you take some trouble for it." His perception of what she meant by this was clearly wanting, so that after a moment she continued: "You don't seem to grasp that I've done for you all I can do, and that the rest now depends on yourself."

"Oh yes, mother, I grasp it," he said without irritation. He took another bite of his bun and then added: "Miss Armiger has made me quite do that."

"Miss Armiger?" Mrs. Beever stared; she even felt that her opportunity was at hand. "What in the world has she to do with the matter?"

"Why I've talked to her a lot about it."

"You mean she has talked to *you* a lot, I suppose. It's immensely like her."

"It's like my dear mamma—that's whom it's like,"

said Paul. "She takes just the same view as yourself. I mean the view that I've a great opening and that I must make a great effort."

"And don't you see that for yourself? Do you require a pair of women to tell you?" Mrs. Beever asked.

Paul, looking grave and impartial, turned her question over while he stirred the tea. "No, not exactly. But Miss Armiger puts everything so well."

"She puts some things doubtless beautifully. Still, I should like you to be conscious of some better reason for making yourself acceptable to Jean than that another young woman, however brilliant, recommends it."

The young man continued to ruminate, and it occurred to his mother, as it had occurred before, that his imperturbability was perhaps a strength. "I am," he said at last. "She seems to make clear to me what I feel."

Mrs. Beever wondered. "You mean of course Jean does."

"Dear no—Miss Armiger!"

The lady of Eastmead laughed out in her

impatience. "I'm delighted to hear you feel anything. You haven't often seemed to me to feel."

"I feel that Jean's very charming."

She laughed again at the way he made it sound. "Is that the tone in which you think of telling her so?"

"I think she'll take it from me in any tone," Paul replied. "She has always been most kind to me; we're very good friends, and she knows what I want."

"It's more than *I* do, my dear! That's exactly what you said to me six months ago—when she liked you so much that she asked you to let her alone."

"She asked me to give her six months for a definite answer, and she likes me the more for having consented to do that," said Paul. "The time I've waited has improved our relations."

"Well, then, they now must have reached perfection. You'll get her definite answer, therefore, this very afternoon."

"When I present the ornament?"

"When you present the ornament. You've got it safe, I hope?"

Paul hesitated; he took another bun. "I imagine it's all right."

"Do you only 'imagine'—with a thing of that value? What have you done with it?"

Again the young man faltered. "I've given it to Miss Armiger. She was afraid I'd lose it."

"And you were not afraid she would?" his mother cried.

"Not a bit. She's to give it back to me on this spot. She wants me too much to succeed."

Mrs. Beever was silent a little. "And how much do you want her to?"

Paul looked blank. "In what?"

"In making a fool of you." Mrs. Beever gathered herself. "Are you in love with Rose Armiger, Paul?"

He judiciously weighed the question. "Not in the least. I talk with her of nobody and nothing but Jean."

"And do you talk with Jean of nobody and nothing but Rose?"

Paul appeared to make an effort to remember. "I scarcely talk with her at all. We're such old friends that there's almost nothing to say."

"There's this to say, my dear—that you take too much for granted!"

"That's just what Miss Armiger tells me. Give me, please, some more tea." His mother took his cup, but she look at him hard and searchingly. He bore it without meeting her eyes, only turning his own pensively to the different dainties on the table. "If I do take a great deal for granted," he went on, "you must remember that you brought me up to it."

Mrs. Beever found only after an instant a reply; then, however, she uttered it with an air of triumph. "I may have brought you up—but I didn't bring up Jean!"

"Well, it's not of her I'm speaking," the young man good-humouredly rejoined; "though I might remind you that she has been here again and again, and month after month, and has always been taught—so far as you could teach her—to regard me as her inevitable fate. Have *you* any real doubt," he went on, "of her recognising in a satisfactory way that the time has come?"


Mrs. Beever transferred her scrutiny to the interior of her teapot. "No!" she said after a moment.

“Then what’s the matter?”

“The matter is that I’m nervous, and that your stolidity makes me so. I want you to behave to me as if you cared—and I want you still more to behave so to her.” Paul made, in his seat, a movement in which his companion caught, as she supposed, the betrayal of a sense of oppression; and at this her own worst fear broke out. “Oh, don’t tell me you *don’t* care—for if you do I don’t know what I shall do to you!” He looked at her with an air he sometimes had, which always aggravated her impatience, an air of amused surprise, quickened to curiosity, that there should be in the world organisms capable of generating heat. She had thanked God, through life, that she was cold-blooded, but now it seemed to face her as a Nemesis that she was a volcano compared with her son. This transferred to him the advantage she had so long monopolised, that of always seeing, in any relation or discussion, the other party become the spectacle, while, sitting back in her stall, she remained the spectator and even the critic. She hated to perform to Paul as she had made others perform to herself; but she determined on the instant that, since she was condemned to do

so, she would do it to some purpose. She would have to leap through a hoop, but she would land on her charger's back. The next moment Paul was watching her while she shook her little flags at him. "There's one thing, my dear, that I can give you my word of honour for—the fact that if the influence that congeals, that paralyses you, happens by any chance to be a dream of what may be open to you in any other quarter, the sooner you utterly dismiss that dream the better it will be not only for your happiness, but for your dignity. If you entertain—with no matter how bad a conscience—a vain fancy that you've the smallest real chance of making the smallest real impression on anybody *else*, all I can say is that you prepare for yourself very nearly as much discomfort as you prepare disgust for your mother." She paused a moment ; she felt, before her son's mild gape, like a trapezist in pink tights. "How much susceptibility, I should like to know, has Miss Armiger at her command for your great charms?"

Paul showed her a certain respect ; he didn't clap her—that is he didn't smile. He felt something, however, which was indicated, as it always was, by



the way his eyes grew smaller : they contracted at times, in his big, fair face, to mere little conscious points. These points he now directed to the region of the house. "Well, mother," he quietly replied, "if you would like to know it, hadn't you better ask her directly?" Rose Armiger had come into view; Mrs. Beever, turning, saw her approach, bare-headed, in a fresh white dress, under a showy red parasol. Paul, as she drew near, left his seat and strolled to the hammock, into which he immediately dropped. Extended there, while the great net bulged and its attachments cracked with his weight, he spoke with the same plain patience. "She has come to give me up the ornament."

XVI

"THE great cake has at last arrived, dear lady!" Rose gaily announced to Mrs. Beever, who waited, before acknowledging the news, long enough to suggest to her son that she was perhaps about to act on his advice.

"I'm much obliged to you for having gone to see about it" was, however, what, after a moment, Miss Armiger's hostess instructed herself to reply.

"It was an irresistible service. I shouldn't have got over on such a day as this," said Rose, "the least little disappointment to dear little Jean."

"To say nothing, of course, of dear little Effie," Mrs. Beever promptly rejoined.

"It comes to the same thing—the occasion so mixes them up. They're interlaced on the cake—with their initials and their candles. There are plenty of candles for each," Rose laughed, "for

their years have been added together. It makes a very pretty number!"

"It must also make a very big cake," said Mrs. Beever.

"Colossal."

"Too big to be brought out?"

The girl considered. "Not so big, you know," she archly replied, "as if the candles had to be yours and mine!" Then holding up the "ornament" to Paul, she said: "I surrender you my trust. Catch!" she added with decision, making a movement to toss him a small case in red morocco, which, the next moment, in its flight through the air, without altering his attitude, he intercepted with one hand.

Mrs. Beever's excited mistrust dropped at the mere audacity of this: there was something perceptibly superior in the girl who could meet half way, so cleverly, a suspicion she was quite conscious of and much desired to dissipate. The lady of Eastmead looked at her hard, reading her desire in the look she gave back. "Trust me, trust me," her eyes seemed to plead; "don't at all events think me capable of any self-seeking that's stupid or

poor. I may be dangerous to myself, but I'm not so to others ; least of all am I so to you." She had a presence that was, in its way, like Tony Bream's : it made, simply and directly, a difference in any personal question exposed to it. Under its action, at all events, Mrs. Beever found herself suddenly feeling that she could after all trust Rose if she could only trust Paul. She glanced at that young man as he lay in the hammock, and saw that in spite of the familiarity of his posture—which indeed might have been assumed with a misleading purpose—his diminished pupils, fixed upon their visitor, still had the expression imparted to them by her own last address. She hesitated ; but while she did so Rose came straight up to her and kissed her. It was the very first time, and Mrs. Beever blushed as if one of her secrets had been surprised. Rose explained her impulse only with a smile ; but the smile said vividly : " I'll polish him off ! "

This brought a response to his mother's lips. " I'll go and inspect the cake ! "

Mrs. Beever took her way to the house, and as soon as her back was turned her son got out of the hammock. An observer of the scene would not

have failed to divine that, with some profundity of calculation, he had taken refuge there as a mute protest against any frustration of his interview with Rose. This young lady herself laughed out as she saw him rise, and her laugh would have been, for the same observer, a tribute to the natural art that was mingled with his obvious simplicity. Paul himself recognised its bearing and, as he came and stood at the tea-table, acknowledged her criticism by saying quietly: "I was afraid dear mamma would take me away."

"On the contrary; she has formally surrendered you."

"Then you must let me perform her office and help you to some tea."

He spoke with a rigid courtesy that was not without its grace, and in the rich shade of her umbrella, which she twirled repeatedly on her shoulder, she looked down with detachment at the table. "I'll do it for myself, thank you; and I should like you to return to your hammock."

"I left it on purpose," the young man said. "Flat on my back, that way, I'm at a sort of disadvantage in talking with you."

"That's precisely why I made the request. I wish you to be flat on your back and to have nothing whatever to reply." Paul immediately re-traced his steps, but before again extending himself he asked her, with the same grave consideration, where in this case she would be seated. "I sha'n't be seated at all," she answered; "I'll walk about and stand over you and bully you." He tumbled into his net, sitting up rather more than before; and, coming close to it, she put out her hand. "Let me see that object again." He had in his lap the little box he had received from her, and at this he passed it back. She opened it, pressing on the spring, and, inclining her head to one side, considered afresh the mounted jewel that nestled in the white velvet. Then, closing the case with a loud snap, she restored it to him. "Yes, it's very good; it's a wonderful stone, and she knows. But that alone, my dear, won't do it." She leaned, facing him, against the tense ropes of the hammock, and he looked up at her. "You take too much for granted."

For a moment Paul answered nothing, but at last he brought out: "That's just what I said to my

mother you had already said when she said just the same."

Rose stared an instant ; then she smiled again. "It's complicated, but I follow you ! She has been waking you up."

"She knows," said her companion, "that you advise me in the same sense as herself."

"She believes it at last—her leaving us together was a sign of that. I have at heart perfectly to justify her confidence, for hitherto she has been so blind to her own interest as to suppose that, in these three weeks, you had been so tiresome as to fall in love with me."

"I particularly told her I haven't at all."

Paul's tone had at moments of highest gravity the gift of moving almost any interlocutor to mirth. "I hope you'll be more convincing than that if you ever particularly tell any one you *have* at all !" the girl exclaimed. She gave a slight push to the hammock, turning away, and he swung there gently a minute.

"You mustn't ask too much of me, you know," he finally said, watching her as she went to the table and poured out a cup of tea.

She drank a little and then, putting down the cup, came back to him. "I should be asking too much of you only if you were asking too much of *her*. You're so far from that, and your position's so perfect. It's too beautiful, you know, what you offer."

"I know what I offer and I know what I don't," Paul returned; "and the person we speak of knows exactly as well. All the elements are before her, and if my position's so fine it's there for her to see it quite as well as for you. I agree that I'm a decent sort, and that, as things are going, my business, my prospects, my guarantees of one kind and another, are substantial. But just these things, for years, have been made familiar to her, and nothing, without a risk of greatly boring her, can very well be added to the account. You and my mother say I take too much for granted; but I take only that." This was a long speech for our young man, and his want of accent, his passionless pauses, made it seem a trifle longer. It had a visible effect on Rose Armiger, whom he held there with widening eyes as he talked. There was an intensity in her face, a bright sweetness that, when he stopped,

seemed to give itself out to him as if to encourage him to go on. But he went on only to the extent of adding; "All I mean is that if I'm good enough for her she has only to take me."

"You're good enough for the best girl in the world," Rose said with the tremor of sincerity. "You're honest and kind; you're generous and wise." She looked at him with a sort of intelligent pleasure, that of a mind fine enough to be touched by an exhibition of beauty even the most occult. "You're so sound—you're so safe that it makes any relation with you a real luxury and a thing to be grateful for." She shed on him her sociable approval, treating him as a happy product, speaking of him as of another person. "I shall always be glad and proud that you've been, if only for an hour, my friend!"

Paul's response to this demonstration consisted in getting slowly and heavily to his feet. "Do you think I *like* what you do to me?" he abruptly demanded.

It was a sudden new note, but it found her quite ready. "I don't care whether you like it or not! It's my duty, and it's yours—it's the right thing."

He stood there in his tall awkwardness ; he spoke as if he had not heard her. "It's too strange to have to take it from you."

"Everything's strange—and the truest things are the strangest. Besides, it isn't so extraordinary as that comes to. It isn't as if you had an objection to her ; it isn't as if she weren't beautiful and good—really cultivated and altogether charming. It isn't as if, since I first saw her here, she hadn't developed in the most admirable way, and also hadn't, by her father's death, come into three thousand a year and into an opportunity for looking, with the red gold of her hair, in the deepest, daintiest, freshest mourning, lovelier far, my dear boy, than, with all respect, any girl who can ever have strayed before, or ever will again, into any Wilverley bank. It isn't as if, granting you do care for me, there were the smallest chance, should you try to make too much of it, of my ever doing anything but listen to you with a pained 'Oh, dear !' pat you affectionately on the back and push you promptly out of the room." Paul Beever, when she thus encountered him, quitted his place, moving slowly outside the wide cluster of chairs, while Rose, within it, turned as he turned, pressing

him with deeper earnestness. He stopped behind one of the chairs, holding its high back and now meeting her eyes. "If you do care for me," she went on with her warm voice, "there's a magnificent way you can show it. You can show it by putting into your appeal to Miss Martle something that she can't resist."

"And what may she not be able to resist?" Paul inquired, keeping his voice steady, but shaking his chair a little.

"Why, *you*—if you'll only be a bit personal, a bit passionate, have some appearance of really desiring her, some that your happiness really depends on her." Paul looked as if he were taking a lesson, and she gave it with growing assurance. "Show her some tenderness, some eloquence, try some touch of the sort that goes home. Speak to her, for God's sake, the words that women like. We all like them, and we all feel them, and you can do nothing good without them. Keep well in sight that what you must absolutely do is *please* her."

Paul seemed to fix his little eyes on this remote aim. "Please her and please you."

"It sounds odd, yes, lumping us together. But

that doesn't matter," said Rose. "The effect of your success will be that you'll unspeakably help and comfort me. It's difficult to talk about it—my grounds are so deep, deep down." She hesitated, casting about her, asking herself how far she might go. Then she decided, growing a little pale with the effort. "I've an idea that has become a passion with me. There's a right I must see done—there's a wrong I must make impossible. There's a loyalty I must cherish—there's a memory I must protect. That's all I can say." She stood there in her vivid meaning like the priestess of a threatened altar. "If that girl becomes your wife—why then I'm at last at rest!"

"You get, by my achievement, what you want—I see. And, please, what do *I* get?" Paul presently asked.

"You?" The blood rushed back to her face with the shock of this question. "Why, you get Jean Martle!" He turned away without a word, and at the same moment, in the distance, she saw the person whose name she had just uttered descend the great square steps. She hereupon slipped through the circle of chairs and rapidly met her companion, who

stopped short as she approached. Rose looked him straight in the eyes. "If you give me the peace I pray for, I'll do anything for you in life!" She left him staring and passed down to the river, where, on the little bridge, Tony Bream was in sight, waving his hat to her as he came from the other house.

XVII

ROSE ARMIGER, in a few moments, was joined by Tony, and they came up the lawn together to where Jean Martle stood talking with Paul. Here, at the approach of the master of Bounds, this young lady anxiously inquired if Effie had not been well enough to accompany him. She had expected to find her there; then, failing that, had taken for granted he would bring her.

"I've left the question, my dear Jean, in her nurse's hands," Tony said. "She had been bedizened from top to toe, and then, on some slight appearance of being less well, had been despoiled, denuded and disappointed. She's a poor little lamb of sacrifice. They were at her again, when I came away, with the ribbons and garlands; but there was apparently much more to come, and I couldn't answer for it that a single sneeze wouldn't again lay everything low. It's in the bosom of the gods. I couldn't wait."

"You were too impatient to be with dear, delightful *us*," Rose suggested.

Tony, with a successful air of very light comedy, smiled and inclined himself. "I was too impatient to be with you, Miss Armiger." The lapse of four years still presented him in such familiar mourning as might consort with a country nook on a summer afternoon; but it also allowed undiminished relief to a manner of addressing women which was clearly instinctive and habitual and which, at the same time, by good fortune, had the grace of flattery without phrases and of irony without impertinence. He was a little older, but he was not heavier; he was a little worn, but he was not worn dull. His presence was, anywhere and at any time, as much as ever the clock at the moment it strikes. Paul Beever's little eyes, after he appeared, rested on Rose with an expression which might have been that of a man counting the waves produced on a sheet of water by the plunge of a large object. For any like ripple on the fine surface of the younger girl he appeared to have no attention.

"I'm glad that remark's not addressed to *me*," Jean said gaily; "for I'm afraid I must im-

mediately withdraw from you the light of my society."

"On whom then do you mean to bestow it?"

"On your daughter, this moment. I must go and judge for myself of her condition."

Tony looked at her more seriously. "If you're at all really troubled about her I'll go back with you. You're too beautifully kind; they told me of your having been with her this morning."

"Ah, you were with her this morning?" Rose asked of Jean in a manner to which there was a clear effort to impart the intonation of the casual, but which had in it something that made the person addressed turn to her with a dim surprise. Jean stood there in her black dress and her fair beauty; but her wonder was not of a sort to cloud the extraordinary radiance of her youth. "For ever so long. Don't you know I've made her my peculiar and exclusive charge?"

"Under the pretext," Tony went on, to Rose, "of saving her from perdition. I'm supposed to be in danger of spoiling her, but Jean treats her quite as spoiled; which is much the greater injury of the two."

"Don't go back, at any rate, please," Rose said to him with soft persuasion. "I never see you, you know, and I want just now particularly to speak to you." Tony instantly expressed submission, and Rose, checking Jean, who, at this, in silence, turned to take her way to the bridge, reminded Paul Beever that she had just heard from him of his having, on his side, some special purpose of an interview with Miss Martle.

At this Paul grew very red. "Oh yes, I should rather like to speak to you, please," he said to Jean.

She had paused half way down the little slope; she looked at him frankly and kindly. "Do you mean immediately?"

"As soon as you've time."

"I shall have time as soon as I've been to Effie," Jean replied. "I want to bring her over. There are four dolls waiting for her."

"My dear child," Rose familiarly exclaimed, "at home there are about forty! Don't you give her one every day or two?" she went on to Tony.

Her question didn't reach him; he was too much interested in Paul's arrangement with Jean, on whom his eyes were fixed. "Go, then—to be the

sooner restored to us. And do bring the kid!" He spoke with jollity.

"I'm going in to change—perhaps I shall presently find you here," Paul put in.

"You'll certainly find me, dear Paul. I shall be quick!" the girl called back. And she lightly went her way while Paul walked off to the house and the two others, standing together, watched her a minute. In spite of her black dress, of which the thin, voluminous tissue fluttered in the summer breeze, she seemed to shine in the afternoon light. They saw her reach the bridge, where, in the middle, she turned and tossed back at them a wave of her handkerchief; after which she dipped to the other side and disappeared.

"Mayn't I give you some tea?" Rose said to her companion. She nodded at the bright display of Mrs. Beever's hospitality; Tony gratefully accepted her offer and they strolled on side by side. "Why have you ceased to call me 'Rose'?" she then suddenly demanded.

Tony started so that he practically stopped; on which she promptly halted. "*Have* I, my dear woman? I didn't know——" He looked at her

and, looking at her, after a moment flagrantly coloured: he had the air of a man who sees something that operates as a warning. What Tony Bream saw was a circumstance of which he had already had glimpses; but for some reason or other it was now written with a largeness that made it resemble a printed poster on a wall. It might have been, from the way he took it in, a big yellow advertisement to the publicity of whose message no artifice of type was wanting. This message was simply Rose Armiger's whole face, exquisite and tragic in its appeal, stamped with a sensibility that was almost abject, a tenderness that was more than eager. The appeal was there for an instant with rare intensity, and what Tony felt in response to it he felt without fatuity or vanity. He could meet it only with a compassion as unreserved as itself. He looked confused, but he looked kind, and his companion's eyes lighted as with the sense of something that at last even in pure pity had come out to her. It was as if she let him know that since she had been at Eastmead nothing whatever had come out.

"When I was at Bounds four years ago," she

said, "you called me Rose and you called our friend there"—she made a movement in the direction Jean had taken—"nothing at all. Now you call her by name and you call me nothing at all."

Tony obligingly turned it over. "Don't I call you Miss Armiger?"

"Is that anything at all?" Rose effectively asked. "You're conscious of some great difference."

Tony hesitated; he walked on. "Between you and Jean?"

"Oh, the difference between me and Jean goes without saying. What I mean is the difference between my having been at Wilverley then and my being here now."

They reached the tea-table, and Tony, dropping into a chair, removed his hat. "What have I called you when we've met in London?"

She stood before him closing her parasol. "Don't you even know? You've called me nothing." She proceeded to pour out tea for him, busying herself delicately with Mrs. Beever's wonderful arrangements for keeping things hot. "Have you by any chance been conscious of what I've called *you*?" she said.

Tony let himself, in his place, be served. "Doesn't every one in the wide world call me the inevitable 'Tony'? The name's dreadful—for a banker; it should have been a bar for me to that career. It's fatal to dignity. But then of course I haven't any dignity."

"I think you haven't much," Rose replied. "But I've never seen any one get on so well without it; and, after all, you've just enough to make Miss Martle recognise it."

Tony wondered. "By calling me 'Mr. Bream'? Oh, for her I'm a greybeard—and I address her as I addressed her as a child. Of course I admit," he added with an intention vaguely pacific, "that she has entirely ceased to be that."

"She's wonderful," said Rose, handing him something buttered and perversely cold.

He assented even to the point of submissively helping himself. "She's a charming creature."

"I mean she's wonderful about your little girl."

"Devoted, isn't she? That dates from long ago. She has a special sentiment about her."

Rose was silent a moment. "It's a little life to preserve and protect," she then said. "Of course!"

"Why, to that degree that she seems scarcely to think the child safe even with its infatuated daddy!"

Still on her feet beyond the table near which he sat, she had put up her parasol again, and she looked across at him from under it. Their eyes met, and he again felt himself in the presence of what, in them, shortly before, had been so deep, so exquisite. It represented something that no lapse could long quench—something that gave out the measureless white ray of a light steadily revolving. She could sometimes turn it away, but it was always somewhere; and now it covered him with a great cold lustre that made everything for the moment look hard and ugly—made him also feel the chill of a complication for which he had not allowed. He had had plenty of complications in life, but he had likewise had ways of dealing with them that were in general clever, easy, masterly—indeed often really pleasant. He got up nervously: there would be nothing pleasant in any way of dealing with this one.

XVIII

CONSCIOUS of the importance of not letting his nervousness show, he had no sooner pointlessly risen than he took possession of another chair. He dropped the question of Effie's security, remembering there was a prior one as to which he had still to justify himself. He brought it back with an air of indulgence which scarcely disguised, however, its present air of irrelevance. "I'll gladly call you, my dear Rose, anything you like, but you mustn't think I've been capricious or disloyal. I addressed you of old—at the last—in the way in which it seemed most natural to address so close a friend of my wife's. But I somehow think of you here now rather as a friend of my own."

"And that makes me so much more distant?" Rose asked, twirling her parasol.

Tony, whose plea had been quite extemporised, felt a slight confusion, which his laugh but inadequately

covered. "I seem to have uttered a *bêtise*—but I haven't. I only mean that a different title belongs, somehow, to a different character."

"I don't admit my character to be different," Rose said; "save perhaps in the sense of its having become a little intensified. If I was here before as Julia's friend, I'm here still more as Julia's friend now."

Tony meditated, with all his candour; then he gave a highly cordial, even if a slightly illogical assent. "Of course you are—from your own point of view." He evidently only wanted to meet her as far on the way to a quiet life as he could manage. "Dear little Julia!" he exclaimed in a manner which, as soon as he had spoken, he felt to be such a fresh piece of pointlessness that, to carry it off, he got up again.

"Dear little Julia!" Rose echoed, speaking out loud and clear, but with an expression which, unlike Tony's, would have left on the mind of an ignorant auditor no doubt of its conveying a reference to the unforgotten dead.

Tony strolled towards the hammock. "May I smoke a cigarette?" She approved with a gesture

that was almost impatient, and while he lighted he pursued with genial gaiety: "I'm not going to allow you to pretend that you doubt of my having dreamed for years of the pleasure of seeing you here again, or of the diabolical ingenuity that I exercised to enable your visit to take place in the way most convenient to both of us. You used to say the queen-mother disliked you. You see to-day how much!"

"She has ended by finding me useful," said Rose. "That brings me exactly to what I told you just now I wanted to say to you."

Tony had gathered the loose net of the hammock into a single strand, and, while he smoked, had lowered himself upon it, sideways, in a posture which made him sit as in a swing. He looked surprised and even slightly disconcerted, like a man asked to pay twice. "Oh, it isn't then what you did say——?"

"About your use of my name? No, it isn't that—it's something quite different." Rose waited; she stood before him as she had stood before her previous interlocutor. "It's to let you know the interest I take in Paul Beaver. I take the very greatest."

"You do?" said Tony approvingly. "Well, you might go in for something worse!"

He spoke with a cheerfulness that covered all the ground; but she repeated the words as if challenging their sense. "I might 'go in'——?"

Her accent struck a light from them, put in an idea that had not been Tony's own. Thus presented, the idea seemed happy, and, in his uncontrollable restlessness, his face more vividly brightening, he rose to it with a zeal that brought him for a third time to his feet. He smiled ever so kindly and, before he could measure his words or his manner, broke out: "If you only really would, you know, my dear Rose!"

In a quicker flash he became aware that, as if he had dealt her a blow in the face, her eyes had filled with tears. It made the taste of his joke too bad. "Are you gracefully suggesting that I shall carry Mr. Beever off?" she demanded.

"Not from *me*, my dear—never!" Tony blushed and felt how much there was to rectify in some of his impulses. "I think a lot of him and I want to keep my hand on him. But I speak of him frankly, always, as a prize, and I want something awfully

good to happen to him. If you like him," he hastened laughingly to add, "of course it does happen—I see!"

He attenuated his meaning, but he had already exposed it, and he could perceive that Rose, with a kind of tragic perversity, was determined to get the full benefit, whatever it might be, of her impression or her grievance. She quickly did her best to look collected. "You think he's safe then, and solid, and not so stupid as he strikes one at first?"

"Stupid?—not a bit. He's a statue in the block—he's a sort of slumbering giant. The right sort of tact will call him to life, the right sort of hand will work him out of the stone."

"And it escaped you just now, in a moment of unusual expansion, that the right sort are mine?"

Tony puffed away at his cigarette, smiling at her resolutely through its light smoke. "You do injustice to my attitude about you. There isn't an hour of the day that I don't indulge in some tribute or other to your great ability."

Again there came into the girl's face her strange alternative look—the look of being made by her

passion so acquainted with pain that even in the midst of it she could flower into charity. Sadly and gently she shook her head. "Poor Tony!" Then she added in quite a different tone: "What do you think of the difference of our ages?"

"Yours and Paul's? It isn't worth speaking of!"

"That's sweet of you—considering that he's only twenty-two. However, I'm not yet thirty," she went on; "and, of course, to gain time, one might press the thing hard." She hesitated again; after which she continued: "It's awfully vulgar, this way, to put the dots on the i's, but as it was you, and not I, who began it, I may ask if you really believe that if one should make a bit of an effort——?" And she invitingly paused, to leave him to complete a question as to which it was natural she should feel a delicacy.

Tony's face, for an initiated observer, would have shown that he was by this time watching for a trap; but it would also have shown that, after a moment's further reflection, he didn't particularly care if the trap should catch him. "If you take such an interest in Paul," he replied with no visible abatement of his preference for the stand-

point of pleasantry, "you can calculate better than I the natural results of drawing him out. But what I can assure you is that nothing would give me greater pleasure than to see you so happily 'established,' as they say—so honourably married, so affectionately surrounded and so thoroughly protected."

"And all alongside of you here?" cried Rose.

Tony faltered, but he went on. "It's precisely your being 'alongside' of one that would enable one to see you."

"It would enable one to see *you*—it would have that particular merit," said Rose. "But my interest in Mr. Beever hasn't at all been of a kind to prompt me to turn the possibility over for myself. You can readily imagine how far I should have been in that case from speaking of it to you. The defect of your charming picture," she presently added, "is that an important figure is absent from it."

"An important figure?"

"Jean Martle."

Tony looked at the tip of his cigarette. "You mean because there was at one time so much

planning and plotting over the idea that she should make a match with Paul?"

"At one time, my dear Tony?" Rose exclaimed. "There's exactly as much as ever, and I'm already—in these mere three weeks—in the very thick of it! Did you think the question had been quite dropped?" she inquired.

Tony faced her serenely enough—in part because he felt the extreme importance of so doing. "I simply haven't heard much about it. Mrs. Beever used to talk about it. But she hasn't talked of late."

"She talked, my good man, no more than half an hour ago!" Rose replied.

Tony winced; but he stood bravely up; his cigarettes were an extreme resource. "Really? And what did she say to you?"

"She said nothing to *me*—but she said everything to her son. She said to him, I mean, that she'll never forgive him if she doesn't hear from him an hour or two hence that he has at last successfully availed himself, with Miss Martle, of this auspicious day, as well as of the fact that he's giving her, in honour of it, something remarkably beautiful."

Tony listened with marked attention, but without meeting his companion's eyes. He had again seated himself in the hammock, with his feet on the ground and his head thrown back; and he smoked freely, holding it with either hand. "What is he giving her?" he asked after a moment

Rose turned away; she mechanically did something at the table. "Shouldn't you think she'd show it to you?" she threw over her shoulder.

While this shoulder, sensibly cold for the instant, was presented, he watched her. "I daresay—if she accepts it."

The girl faced him again. "And won't she accept it?"

"Only—I should say—if she accepts *him*."

"And won't she do that?"

Tony made a "ring" with his cigarette. "The thing will be for him to get her to."

"That's exactly," said Rose, "what I want you to do."

"Me?" He now stared at her. "How can I?"

"I won't undertake to tell you how—I'll leave that to your ingenuity. Wouldn't it be a matter—just an easy extension—of existing relations? You

saw just now that he appealed to her for his chance and that she consented to give it to him. What I wanted you to hear from me is that I feel how much interested you'll be in learning that this chance is of the highest importance for him and that I know with how good a conscience you'll throw your weight into the scale of his success."

"My weight with the young lady? Don't you rather exaggerate my weight?" Tony asked.

"That question can only be answered by your trying it. It's a situation in which not to take an interest is—well, not your duty, you know," said Rose.

Tony gave a smile which he felt to be a little pale; but there was still good-humour in the tone in which he protestingly and portentously murmured: "Oh, my 'duty'——!"

"Surely; if you see no objection to poor Mrs. Beever's at last gathering the fruit of the tree she long ago so fondly and so carefully planted. Of course if you should frankly tell me you see one that I don't know——!" She looked ingenuous and hard. "*Do* you, by chance, see one?"

"None at all. I've never known a tree of Mrs. Beever's of which the fruit hasn't been sweet."

"Well, in the present case—sweet or bitter!—it's ready to fall. This is the hour the years have pointed to. You think highly of Paul——"

Tony Bream took her up. "And I think highly of Jean, and therefore I must see them through? I catch your meaning. But have you—in a matter composed, after all, of ticklish elements—thought of the danger of one's meddling?"

"A great deal." A troubled vision of this danger dawned even now in Rose's face. "But I've thought still more of one's possible prudence—one's occasional tact." Tony, for a moment, made no reply; he quitted the hammock and began to stroll about. Her anxious eyes followed him, and presently she brought out: "Have you really been supposing that they've given it up?"

Tony remained silent; but at last he stopped short, and there was an effect of returning from an absence in the way he abruptly demanded: "That who have given up what?"

"That Mrs. Beever and Paul have given up what

we're talking about—the idea of his union with Jean."

Tony hesitated. "I haven't been supposing anything at all!" Rose recognised the words for the first he had ever uttered to her that expressed even a shade of irritation, and she was unable to conceal that she felt, on the spot, how memorable this fact was to make them. Tony's immediate glance at her showed equally that he had instantly become aware of their so affecting her. He did, however, nothing to modify the impression: he only stood a moment looking across the river; after which he observed quietly: "Here she is—on the bridge."

He had walked nearer to the stream, and Rose had moved back to the tea-table, from which the view of the bridge was obstructed. "Has she brought the child?" she asked.

"I don't make out—she may have her by the hand." He approached again, and as he came he said: "Your idea is really that I should speak to her now?"

"Before she sees Paul?" Rose met his eyes; there was a quick anguish of uncertainty in all her person. "I leave that to you—since you cast a

doubt on the safety of your doing so. I leave it," said Rose, "to your judgment—I leave it to your honour."

"To my honour?" Tony wondered with a showy jerk of his head what the deuce his honour had to do with it.

She went on without heeding him. "My idea is only that, whether you speak to her or not, she shall accept him. Gracious heavens, she *must*!" Rose broke out with passion.

"You take an immense interest in it!" Tony laughed.

"Take the same, then, yourself, and the thing will come off." They stood a minute looking at each other, and more passed between them than had ever passed before. The result of it was that Rose had a drop from her strenuous height to sudden and beautiful gentleness. "Tony Bream, I trust you."

She had uttered the word in a way that had the power to make him flush. He answered peaceably, however, laughing again: "I hope so, my dear Rose!" Then in a moment he added: "I *will* speak." He glanced again at the circuitous path from the bridge, but Jean had not yet emerged from the shrubbery

by which it was screened. "If she brings Effie will you take her?"

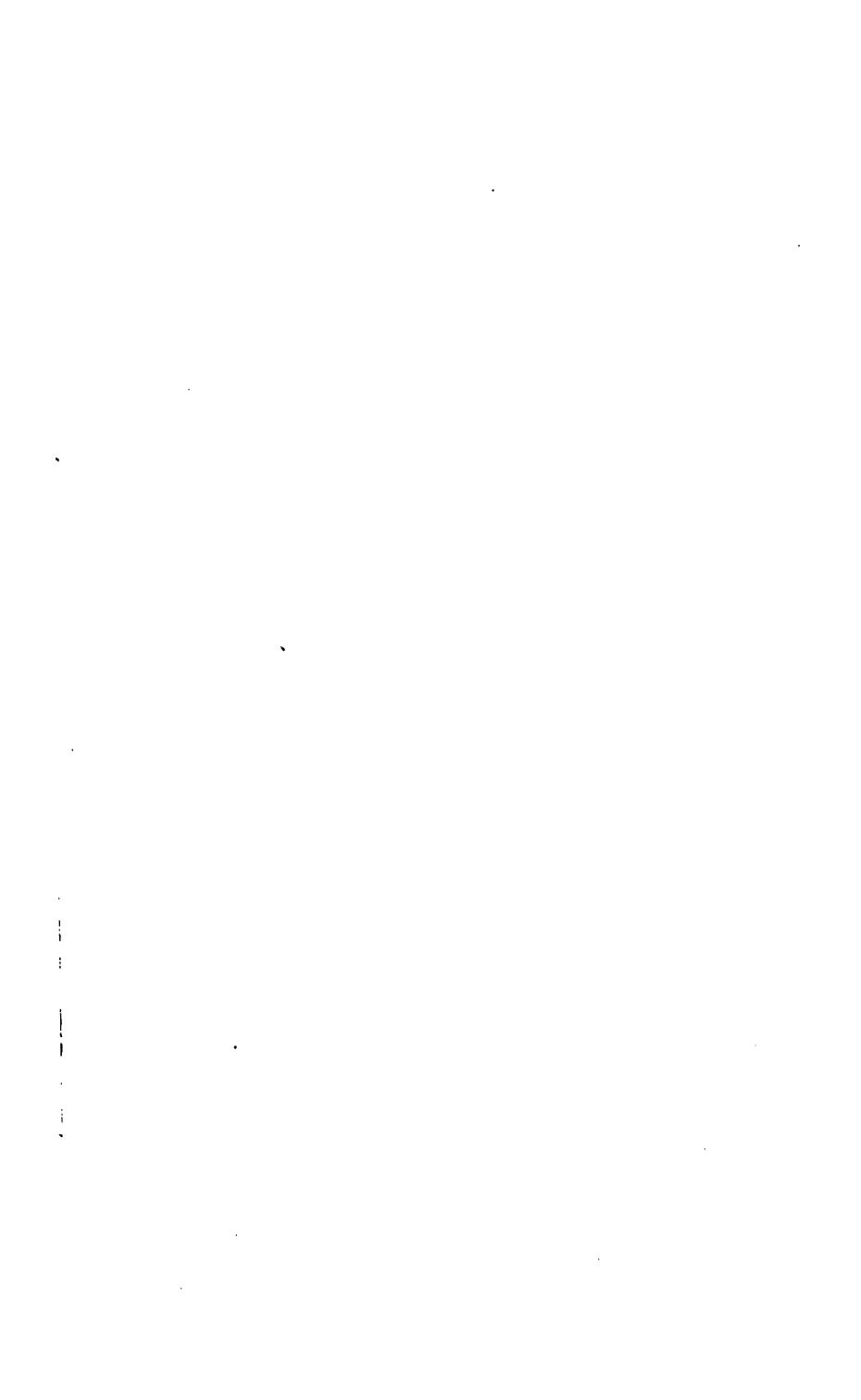
With her ominous face the girl considered. "I'm afraid I can't do that."

Tony gave a gesture of impatience. "Good God, how you stand off from the poor little thing!"

Jean at this moment came into sight without the child. "I shall never take her from *her*!" And Rose Armiger turned away.

END OF VOL. I

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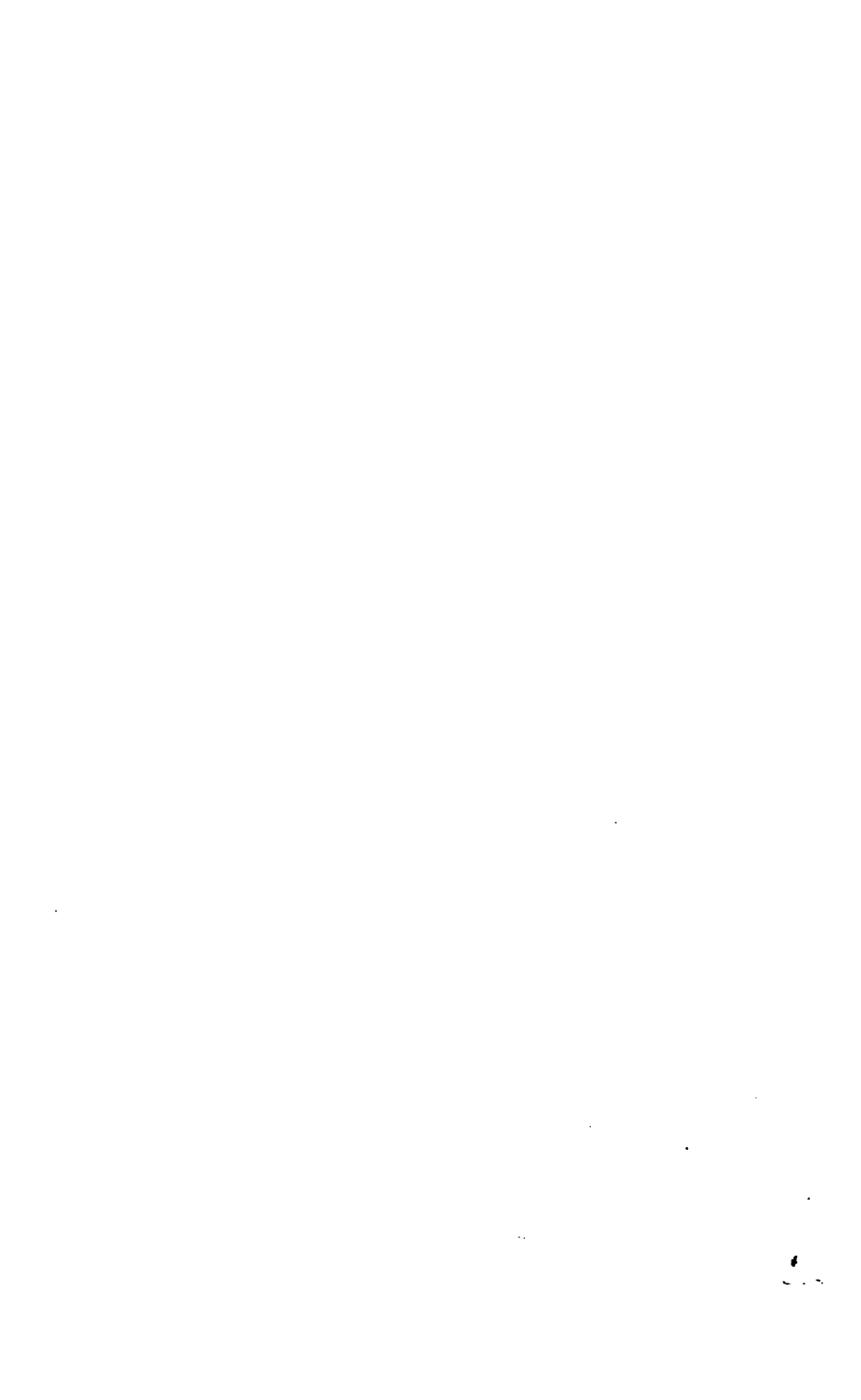
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